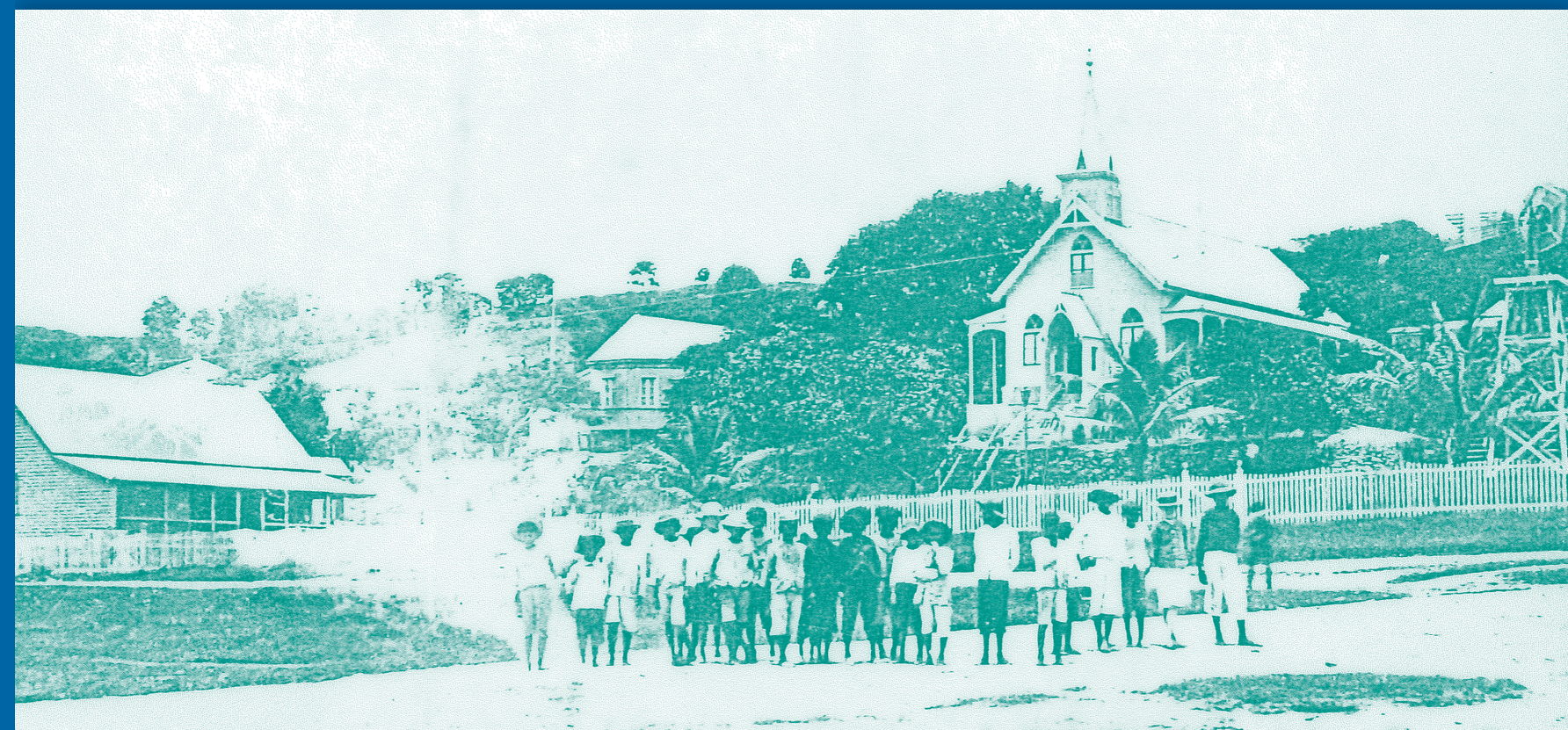


History  
*of*  
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School  
Thursday Island  
1887–2012

*Including the History of  
St. Joseph's School, Hammond Island  
1929–1964*



Br. Barry Lamb FMS

History of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School  
Thursday Island, 1887-2012

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Author: Br. Barry Lamb, F.M.S.

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## Foreword and Acknowledgements

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The Jubilee of 125 years of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, called for a written history, since there had been no history written for the centenary in 1987. In the course of compiling the history it was realized that the school on Hammond Island – St. Joseph’s School – enjoyed such an intimate connection with the T.I. school that the two histories was intertwined. And so resulted the lengthy title of the History, embracing the histories of both schools.

The writing of a *Foreword* of a book that one has put together can be self-indulgent and self-justifying. I admit to both. The following words are addressed to that special band of persons who read forewords to books.

I consider what is presented here as the “First Edition” of the History of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, 1887-2012 and St. Joseph’s School, Hammond Island, 1929-1964. In the Second and subsequent editions will be corrections of errors in the First, and the filling of gaps and omissions. Further editions will also embellish the story with further material that time and research did not allow in the First edition. The reader should keep in mind that I had just eleven months to begin and complete the research and writing of this history.

*“Why should I have all the fun of looking over the original sources?”* is a consideration I hold dear in presenting the results of my research. I have included many facsimiles of original sources for the interest and delight of the reader. And so there are to be found many photos, sketches, newspaper facsimiles, pages from printed books and numerous direct quotations. I believe these all bring alive the times being presented. The reader becomes, in a way, a researcher once removed.

An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to all those who conscientiously preserved records through the decades. Especially to those who kept the fifty original copies of Inspectors’ Reports from many of the years from 1905 to 1980. It’s a minor miracle that these were extant and available.

Special thanks to those who decided on the “Trove” project of the National Library of Australia and those who did the painstaking work of posting facsimiles of Australian newspapers onto the net. And similarly, the material posted on the net by the State Library of Queensland and the National Library of Australia was invaluable.

The staff in the John Oxley Library at the State Library of Queensland were particularly helpful as were those assisting researchers at the State Archives of Queensland. Staff at the State Library of New South Wales were most helpful, and I enjoyed many hours there recalling my introduction to research into original sources in the very same Reading Room 50 plus years previously while studying Arts at Sydney University.

The Local History collection at the Cairns Municipal Library was also valuable, as was the Local History section of the Thursday Island Municipal Library.

Finding Sister Bernadette Koning FDNsc via email at the Mother House of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Rome was a special blessing. Sister was able to email me portraits of approximately 25 Sisters from the earliest days, including the very first three French Sisters from 1886. Long letters/reports in French from visiting Superiors reporting back to France in 1898 and 1912 were also invaluable sources of information that Sister Bernadette was able to provide. Sister Mona Sackley Osh, assisted by Carolyn Ryan at the Archives of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Kensington in Sydney were specially helpful and patient with my enquiries.

Many more folk were of great help in providing photos or anecdotes, memoirs, and other forms of assistance: Father Jim Littleton MSC, Sister Elizabeth Little FDNsc, Father Izaías Silva MSC, Brother Brendan Delaney MSC, Pat Jones, Maria Mills, Cate Titasey, Christine Benjamin, Margaret Krinjin, Ursula McElaren, Bridie Roche, Denis Roche, Sister Ruth Paton, Father Miah McSweeney, Father John Newman, Father Tyrone Deere,



William Anderson, Peter Calahora, Lola Lyons, Cecilia and Gary O'Brien, Cheryl Fulton, Doug Webb, Tony Tulacz, Melissa Lovejoy, John Draney, Marist Brothers: Desmond Murphy, Frederick McMahon, Tim Beencke, Bertrand Webster and Anthony Hunt; Vincent Dorante, Colin Jones, Henry Garnier, Sister Marietta Garnier, Camilla Sabatino, Anima Pearson, Reg Sabatino, Mary Bin-Juda, Josephine David-Petero, Christine Garnier, Fr. Ronayne-Forde OFM, Margaret SeeKee, Marie Mosby, Robyn See Kee, Billy & Sariba Shibasaki, Peter Sabatino, Marie Dieppe, Dorothy Sagigi, Dot Shea, Dr. Bill Sultmann, Marsha Loban, Andrea Gregory, Christine Connor, Sabine Anderson, Cessa Nakata, Ina Titasey, Jean Hamilton, Helen Kett, Stacey Whiteside, Kimberley See Kee, Brian Arndt.

Sister Faye Kelly of the Sisters of Mercy was most generous in making available to me five albums of photos of the time of the Sisters on T.I. as well as several most valuable letters from the earliest Sisters. Sisters Rovenia Duffy, Patricia Butterfield and Marie Masterson were generous in sharing their memories viva voce and writing short memoirs.

I would like to specially thank various ones who helped flesh out the story of the Evacuation to Cooyar and the time there, 1942-1944: Jean Petersen, Tom Leahy, Terry Cuskelly, Dan Kruger, Darcy Dukes, Gabrielle Cavanagh, Joyce Simpson and Shirley McDougall and Joan Barker.

The Diocesan archives in Cairns related to OLSH School, Thursday Island, were particularly helpful and I believe thanks should go to Mary Cath Togolo who arranged the archives most systematically, but who died some years ago. Similarly I am enormously indebted to Gwen Moloney, who, years after her death, shared with me the many doings of the School and the people of Thursday Island through the microfilm copies of her personally hand-typed weekly newspaper, *Torres News*, from 1957 to 1988. I felt I knew Gwen as I read her many reports of the comings and goings of the Sisters and teachers, processions, sacraments, sports, picnics, exam results etc. Valuable insights into social and political life on Thursday Island more generally were also gleaned from the *Torres News*. And though he died more than 70 years ago I must thank Mr. Alexander Corran for all the copies of the *Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Examiner*, the *Torres Straits Pilot* and the *Torres Daily Pilot* stretching from 1898 to his death in 1940. The owner and editor of these newspapers, which were printed on a special press on Thursday Island, Mr. Corran has left us, through access to microfilm copies held in the Queensland State Library, a mirror of life on Thursday Island over that sweep of its history.

Maureen Worthy of the Cairns Catholic Education Office, after telling me of her love of history and her interest in reading what I was putting together, agreed to look carefully over the text for her impressions, corrections and questions. Her encouragement was particularly valuable as was her sharp eye that could detect a missing semi-colon or an extra full stop, as well as awkward or incomprehensible expressions. If, as inevitably will happen, there will be mistakes in the text, they will not be through Maureen's having missed anything.

Some readers may be critical that the history as I have presented it may give too little emphasis and detail to the spiritual development of the children and whether they have, indeed, become disciples of Jesus and are in the habits of prayer and right living. While such matters are the fundamental reason for the establishment of the school and its continuation, it is difficult, if not impossible, to observe or assess these matters. It might rightly be said that such matters are between the child (and adult graduate) and God. There is very little research material by way of personal reflections or diaries etc. that touch on these matters. And any scanty such resources would be hardly representative. And so through the years the teachers "do their best" to nurture a love of Jesus and the following of his way of life ... and must leave it at that.

Another criticism I anticipate is my inclusion of minutiae. Many tiny details are included. My thought on this is that the choice is between some information and none; and I choose some. This 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to tell as much of the story of the Schools and their setting as possible. In fifty or a hundred years time I believe it will be of interest to future readers to learn about the discarding of bottles and tins and the one-time prevalence of goats on the island; the discrimination in seating at the cinema; the floats entered in various civic processions; the warning to the Premier that the paint was, indeed, wet; the distribution of medals at the time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee; the playing of the piano by a child as the children marched into school; the knitting of clothing by the children for the troops in the First World War;

the parade of Lord Kitchener right outside the convent etc. etc. And those who lack interest in these marginal matters can skim over them.

The many page references to the sources of different matters I see as valuable to the future historian. It also gives authority to the veracity of what is being written. I believe it is infinitely better than statements that do not give the exact source and cannot be verified.

I would like to record that undertaking this research and preparing the text has been one of the most enjoyable hobbies I have ever undertaken. It has been a delight in following up a lead and finding a fund of material to help fill out the story. The background story of Sister Marietta Roche and the story of the evacuation to Cooyar during the Second World War, and the story of Hammond Island were three such narratives that were rewarded with invaluable material thanks to deliberate enquiries and almost chance remarks by this one or that. Life in the “orphanage”, too, through yarning with Ina and Cessa Mills, and access to the most detailed biography of Ina put together by Cate Titasey, was another such story that acquired quaint detail through seeking it.

My great joy would be to discover that some readers may find as much interest and enchantment in the story as I have found. And my hope is that anyone opening this history at random in the years to come might exclaim: *“My goodness, this is interesting!”*

Brother Barry Lamb, FMS,  
Thursday Island, Easter, 2012.





## CHAPTER 1

### Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School begins, 1887

#### First classes

The verandah of the convent, with an outlook over a few straggling houses and further on to the turquoise blue of the Strait, provided the first “classroom” of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island. The earliest picture of the convent is in the accompanying section of

the colourful Calendar of Thursday Island of 1897. The first teacher was Mother Mary Paul (pictured),<sup>1</sup> a non-English speaking Sister who was taking the young sons of the Government Resident, Mr. John Douglas, for lessons in French and German. But soon she was joined by Sister Margaret Sweeney (pictured below) who might more rightly be considered to be the school’s founder.



Sydney born Sister Mary Margaret, as she was known, arrived the next year, in 1887.

Sister Margaret was not yet a fully-fledged Sister, but rather a novice in the Congregation. A novice is a Sister-in-training. The resume of a letter, simply dated “1887”, as recorded in the history of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, states:

*The apostolate goes on. Activity in the little school on the convent verandah. Boys being taught to serve Mass. People, Catholics and non-Catholics, attracted to the church for the Holy Week ceremonies. Sisters’ lively individual apostolate among adults, but discouraging at times.*<sup>2</sup>

Prior to Sister Margaret arriving, there were already three Sisters in the convent, but they were not English-speakers; they were French speaking. They had arrived in 1886.

(Photo shows John Douglas with his four sons, Edward, Henry, Cecil and Hugh, much later, in 1903)



And prior to the French Sisters arriving, the founders of the “Sacred Heart Mission”, as it was called, and continued to be called for the next 125 years, had arrived in 1884 and had prepared the way for the Sisters.

The first Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the founding Congregation, were “*Father A. Navarre, the Superior, together with Father H. Verius and some Brothers.*”<sup>3</sup>

These Brothers, anonymous in this extract, had built and made ready a “*little three-roomed*” convent for the Sisters.<sup>4</sup> In another place we read that the convent building was “*a ready cut house from Sydney.*”<sup>5</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Hartzler, Fernand and Leopold, *Fire Upon the Earth*, Sydney, E.J. Dwyer, 1948, Pp.62-3.; translated from the French of approx. 1913.

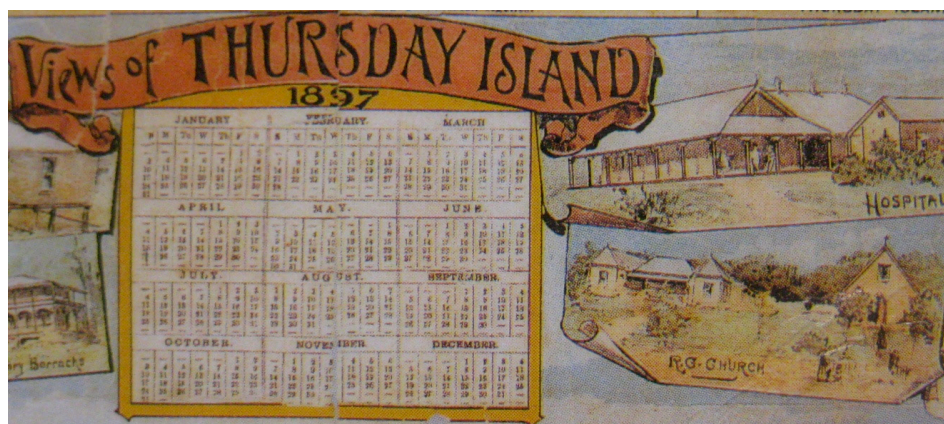
<sup>2</sup> *As It Was In The Beginning*, 1985, Generalate of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Rome, p.125; Letter of Sister Madeleine to Mother Marie Louise.

<sup>3</sup> *History of the Australian Province of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*, Provincial House, Kensington, Sydney, 1974, p.126. This would have been taken from a letter from Sister Madeline to Mother Marie Louise of 1885 where the names of the Brothers are not mentioned: ““On Tuesday, February 10, Father Navarre and Father Verius, together with the Brothers, left ...” *As It Was In The Beginning*, p.79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1993, to the Rt. Honourable The Premier of Queensland, Hon. Johannes Bjelke Petersen, briefing him on some details of the history of the school in preparation for his coming to open a school building. This is supported by a reference in a letter from Sister Madeline dated 1885, saying “*Now nothing had gone up [to Thursday Island] except our pre-fabricated house.*” Quoted in *As It Was In The Beginning*, p.83.





Two of these three builder Brothers' names are revealed in another account, though. In his book, *"Life for a Mission"*, Fr. Philip Sevenau, M.S.C. writes<sup>6</sup>:

*"The time was now ripe [to go to Papua, some time in 1885 or 1886], and the opportunity there to be seized. It was now time to decide on who*

*was to go. The superior, Fr. Navarre, dearly wished to be first: 'It was my hope,' he wrote "to be able to raise the standard of the Sacred Heart on this so-far unevangelised land. But man proposes and God disposes." Reluctantly he gave up the idea, for he had begun building a small church and was the only one able to carry on the work. So it was decided that Fr. Verius, with the two Brothers Salvatore and Nicola would go."*

And in another place we learn the name of the other Brother: Mariano<sup>7</sup>. And in yet another place is the name of Brother Guissepe de Santis, the first Brother to arrive.<sup>8</sup>

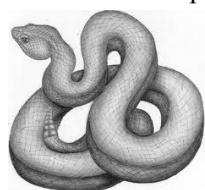
The brief account of the founding of the Mission prepared for the booklet, *"Our First Hundred Years"* (1984),<sup>9</sup> the Brothers' names are clearly given as: "three young Italian Brothers": Mariano Travaglini, Nicola Marconi and Salvador Gasbarra.

## The Sisters' convent

Before Sister Margaret arrived, the three Sisters had settled into their new home. The French Sisters first spied their convent from the ship through a telescope:

*"Hardly had we entered the harbour than we were up on deck trying to make out the Fathers' house with the aid of a telescope. In front of us overlooking the town and the harbour, we saw a church surmounted by a cross, and on the left a large wooden building. 'Here is our house,' we cried with hearts overflowing." And once having taken up residence, there is this description of the house: "Here we are now in our own house. Three rooms comprise our convent. That which overlooks the sea can be divided into community room, parlour and refectory. The two smaller rooms look out on the hill. The house is built on piles, and shakes at every step."*<sup>10</sup>

And in another place<sup>11</sup> we learn about the primitive air conditioning:



*"In the morning at about 8 a.m. it [the heat] is already excessive. That explains to you why in our house the windows are empty of window panes and the doorways have no doors. All that kind of thing is useless in the heat."*

Another reference<sup>12</sup> tells of their early introduction to some Australian fauna:

*"We have had some very disagreeable visitors. For some time a huge snake, nearly two yards long and as thick as one's arm, has been making nightly visits to the poultry yard. Sometimes we hear him hissing under the window, and we do not feel too safe."*

## Sister Margaret Sweeney

The three French Sisters who arrived in January, 1886, were Sister Paul Pedrix, Sister Madeleine Masselin and Sister Claire Dessailley. It may be fanciful to imagine their being carried bodily, one at a time, to shore by

<sup>6</sup> P.47.

<sup>7</sup> From a letter by Fr. Navarre, May 3, 1886 as quoted in *As It Was In the Beginning*, p.124.

<sup>8</sup> Littleton, James, M.S.C., *Sacred Heart Mission Torres Strait 1884-1967*, Fyshwick, ACT, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Sacred Heart Mission, *Our First One Hundred Years*, G.K. Bolton, Cairns, 1984, un-numbered pages.

<sup>10</sup> Hartzer, Fernand and Leopold, *Fire Upon the Earth*, Sydney, E.J. Dwyer, 1948, P.61; (translated from the French, in approx. 1913.)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, P.66.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, P.61.

a sturdy Sri Lankan gentleman. And the same might be imagined of the arrival of Sister Margaret Sweeney. For we read in an account dated July 1885:

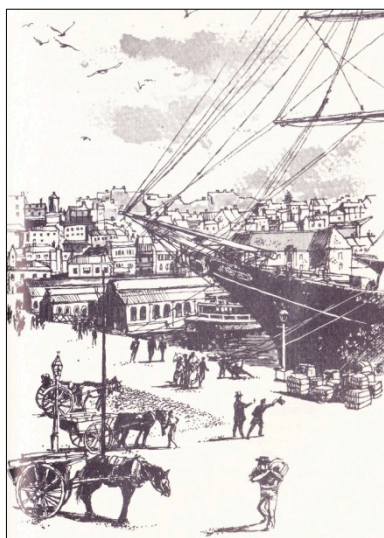
*“... the greatest drawback first noticeable to all strangers is the absence of a pier or jetty, which necessitates going ashore in a waterman’s boat, and these aquatic “johns” mostly coloured men, are (to use a colonial expression) “cheeky” – of course there may be exceptions – and owing to the want of a boat jetty you have to mount a darkie steed to gain terra firma.”*<sup>13</sup>

Whether each Sister was carried by a cheeky fellow or an “exception” is not recorded.

Why Sister Margaret Sweeney? *“When the Sisters arrived there [T.I.] in January, 1886, it quickly became apparent that English-speaking personnel would be needed for the school to be commenced.”*<sup>14</sup>

Sister Margaret was Australian and by 1886 she had begun her training as a Sister in Sydney.

Born in 1866 of Irish parents Margaret grew up in Ryde, in Sydney. She frequented the *Villa Maria* church at Hunters’ Hill as a girl. There she had become acquainted with French Marist priests and had become



proficient in the French language. In January, 1885, when Margaret was almost 19, the first OLSH sisters, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, as they are called, arrived in Botany Bay on their way from France to the mission of Oceania. They were first given accommodation by the Marist Fathers. Fr. Navarre MSC, who had come to meet them from Thursday Island, was waiting for them at *Villa Maria*. Margaret, through this connection, met the first Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart when they arrived. It seems that soon after this she showed her interest in joining the Sisters and began to learn about their life from the only Irish nun to be part of the first arrivals, Sister Mary Xavier Ryan.<sup>15</sup>

When it became apparent that English-speaking Sisters were needed on T.I., Margaret was an obvious choice. An added advantage was that she had a good mastery of French as her companions in the convent were French-speaking. And so *she “received her mission cross for Thursday island.”*

And even though she had not completed her training Margaret was selected to travel to Thursday Island to begin the school. It was agreed that she could continue her training under Sister Mary Paul and Fr. Navarre.<sup>16</sup> On January 8, 1887, she left Sydney with Mother Ligouri Debroux to join the Sisters already on T.I..<sup>17</sup>

(The sketch is by Joan Saint and is an artist’s recreation of the Quay in Sydney at the time of Sister Margaret’s departure from Sydney for Thursday Island. It is an illustration from an account of the life of Marie Louise Hartzler, written in the form of a novel by Nance Carol Baker in 1976.)

Sister Margaret had a variety of gifts and it is recorded that she taught catechism to the wives of the Filipino fisherman as well as school to the children and assisted in the hospital that the Sisters established and *“endeared herself to all by her kindness and gaiety, showing a remarkable aptitude for nursing.”*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *The Brisbane Courier*, July 1, 1885, p.6

<sup>14</sup> *As It Was In The Beginning*, p. 126

<sup>15</sup> Much of this information is taken from a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the Sisters and available on the net in 2011.

<sup>16</sup> *As It Was In The Beginning*, Generalate of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Rome, 1985, p.125.

<sup>17</sup> Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, *History of the Australian Province*, Kensington, 1974, p.127

<sup>18</sup> Internet posting by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, 2011.



## The Foundation Sisters



As mentioned, three French Sisters preceded Sister Margaret, arriving the previous year, 1886. While not being closely involved in the School these Sisters would have been an enormous support for Sister Margaret in the community. Margaret, skilled in the French language, would have had animated conversations with them and they would have helped in any way they could with the foundation of the school. Their portraits have been located in the Archives of the Sisters in Rome and the present researcher is indebted to Sister Bernadette for her research. They are left to right: Sister Claire Dessailly, Sister M. Paul Perdix and Sister Madeleine Masselin.

## Description of the arrival of the first three Sisters

A vivid description of the arrival of the first three French Sisters in 1886 is given in a book written jointly by Fathers Fernand and Leopold Hartzer. They were in an excellent position to report accurately on the events of the 1880s and 1890s as Fernand had been Parish Priest on Thursday Island during part of that time and the two of them had been commissioned to write the story of their mother, Sister Marie Louise Hartzer<sup>19</sup>, the superior of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. The Sisters wrote letters to Sister Marie Louise and the authors had access to these. In a letter written to Sister Marie Louise to tell of their arrival, one of the Sisters wrote<sup>20</sup>:

*"We waited while a number of small craft cruised around the steamer. Everyone wanted to see the Sisters. At last along came a launch. This time it was Father Navarre coming to take us ashore. He could not come any sooner, because the Manila men, hearing of our arrival, had taken the Fathers' boat to come out to meet us themselves." ... "We were all ready to leave the ship when we saw Father Verius arriving. He had at last got back his boat and had come to get our luggage."*

And in a letter that Father Navarre wrote to headquarters<sup>21</sup> in France in 1886 telling about the Sisters' arrival: *"Their [the Sisters'] arrival in Thursday Island was an event for the whole community."*

## The Catholic population from which the pupils came

*"The population of Thursday Island at that time included a handful of Europeans and many Filipinos or Manila-men as they were called locally, most of whom were Catholics. Many of them had married Torres Strait Islander women. Many of these men became very devoted to the Mission and wanted the Sisters to instruct and to help their wives and children.... The Catholics among the Europeans also wanted the Sisters to commence a Catholic School for their children."*<sup>22</sup>

A fuller understanding of this request from Europeans is found in the biography<sup>23</sup> of the superior of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Marie Louise Hartzer, mentioned earlier. Soon after arriving the

<sup>19</sup> Her story is very briefly told on another chapter of this history.

<sup>20</sup> Hartzer, Fernand and Leopold, *Fire Upon the Earth*, Sydney, E.J. Dwyer, 1948, p. 61; translated from the French of approx. 1913.,

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>22</sup> *Sacred Heart Mission Our First One Hundred Years*, 1984.

<sup>23</sup> Hartzer, Fernand and Leopold, *Fire Upon the Earth*, Sydney, E.J. Dwyer, 1948; translated from the French, of approx. 1913.

Sisters were introduced to the Government Resident, John Douglas, “... whose wife and four little boys are Catholics. ... They want them to teach their children French and German. Mother Mary Paul will do this.”

The teaching of the Douglas boys (and any others) by Sister Mary Paul would have been more by way of coaching or tutoring rather than school-teaching. This teaching of French and German would have begun in 1886, whereas the origin of the “school” is usually given as 1887, following the arrival of Sister Margaret Sweeney, when it could rightly be said that “school” began.

### The general population of Thursday Island at the time

In other places there is mention of the great diversity of nationalities represented on Thursday Island. But the description of the Parish Priest, Father Fernand Hartzler, of 1894<sup>24</sup> is so expressive that it deserves quotation. Though reproduced here in French, the nationalities clearly stand out and dramatically tell the story. The paragraph opens with the question, “*What can one say about the population?*”:

*“Que dire de la population? Je crois qu’il y a peu de points du globe ou on puisse trouver un plus grand melange de races et de croyances. A cote des Europeens don’t le nombre ne depasse guere 600, on voit le Chinois, petit commercant, ou maraicher (c’est le Juif d l’Extreme-Orient), le Japonaise, son cousin, marchand de laques et de soie, mais surtout pecheur de perles; les Cingalais, a la longue chevelure d’un noir de jais, son vendeurs de nacre et de bijoux; les Malais, les Javanais, les Indiens de Bombay, et de Calcutta sont serviteurs; enfinsur la flotilla de bateaux qui fait la peche des nacres de perle, les tortues et de la biche-de-mer on recontre le negre de Zanzibar et do Mozambique, bien member, prodigusement noir et toujours bon garcon; des creoles de Maurice, et des negress de Bourbon parlant francais, des noirs des Etats-Unis se disant Yankees; des Bresalienns, des Chiliens, des Peruviens, enfin, et surtout, des Manillois catholiques et bon catholiques, don’t ueloques-uns sont maries a des orphelines chritiennes de Hong-Kong, ou a des Portugaises de Goa.”*

One of the original Sisters, Sister Madeline, wrote of the population of the island of the time:

*“The small population included native Torres Strait islanders, those engaged in the pearling industry – boat owners, crew, divers and so forth, mainly from Manila and many of them Catholics, also Japanese. There was the usual admixture of adventurers and moral ne’er-do-wells from various parts of the world who corrupted and degraded the islanders.”*<sup>25</sup>

### Cluster of Mission buildings

We’re told of the earliest buildings of the Mission in a press report from *The Townsville Herald* of 1886<sup>26</sup>:

*“A small, unpretentious iron church, some little distance up the hill ... marks the site of the Catholic mission of the Sacred Heart. On one side of the church is a small house, the residence of the four Sisters of Mercy [sic]<sup>27</sup>, and on the other a more spacious residence designed, not only for the abiding place of the father Superior, but also of a kind of sanatorium where fever-stricken and debilitated priests from New guinea and other islands may come, to endeavour to regain a sufficient amount of health to enable them to resume their duties.”*



### First School building

The first school building was at street level on Douglas St. and it was only much later that a school building, other than the Orphanage, was built further up the hill from the Convent and Church.

*“The first school was built around 1900, on the site of the present Hall, a school which remained in use until 1962. It was complemented in 1932 by a building known as the Sergeant-Major’s Office, bought from the Army Garrison on the hill for 20 pounds. It was erected by a Mr. Jim Cadzow and opened by the Hon. Ted Hanlon, the then Premier of Queensland. It became the Infants School with Sister M Urban as the first Sister-in-Charge.”*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Hartzler, F., *Annales Propagation de la Foi* (Journal), Tome 66, 1894, p.293.

<sup>25</sup> *As It Was In The Beginning*, p.121.

<sup>26</sup> Location 22: 1-3. This citation is taken from Gunn, Michael, Michael Gunn Architects, *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church Consersation Study*, January, 2000, p.12.

<sup>27</sup> A clear mistake on the reporter’s part. The Sisters, of course, were the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Premier Johannes Bjelke-Petersen in 1973 briefing him on the history of the school.

Father Hartzer, writing just before 1894, has the following to say about the building of the church, the Sisters' convent, the school and the hospital:

*"Et porrtant, ce sont les pauvres Manilois, qui, a Thursday Island, nous on aides a batir l'eglise, a batir le couvent des soeurs, leur ecole et l'hopital de la Mission."*<sup>29</sup>

The translation would be that the Manila men, -- the Filipinos -- "helped us build" the church, the convent, the school and the hospital. If this were published in Europe in 1894 it clearly implies that the school had been built before 1894. The secondary source quoted above, suggesting the first school was built "around 1900", should clearly be revised to an earlier date.

## Preaching to the Manila men

These Kanaka divers are very shrewd in worldly wisdom, in spite of their superstitions. I went to the morning mass at the little Roman church at Thursday Island, and felt much amused by the French priest there and his dusky congregation.

He was lecturing them on the virtue of giving to the poor and the Church. 'You see, children, de poor Virgin dere, all bare and unadorned—is it not a shame?'

He paused, and looked at the stolid rows of faces fronting him, but no one seemed to take the hint. Then he went on afresh:

'Not for mine self would I ask of your plenty, which you waste on gin, but for de Church, de Blessed Virgin, and de poor.'

No apparent comprehension was expressed on the part of the hearers. They were attentive but irresponsible.

'Ah ha! Now I know you have pearls—many good pearls—in your breasts, under your shirts, hiding.' Every black paw made a clutch through the open shirt-fronts, while the men looked as if a dark secret had been discovered.

'Ah, do not be afraid, I would not take one little pearl from one of you. But yet see, de poor Virgin has not yet one single string of de pure beautiful pearls to hang round her neck for de good of de poor, and yet you melt them down your own necks every day!'

Poor foreign father! He was deeply in earnest I could hear, but as I went out I did not see any of the pearls forthcoming. I have often wondered since if the Virgin has been provided yet with a little chaplet.

The superintendent

The reader may enjoy reading the facsimile description written in the late 1890s by Hume Nisbet<sup>30</sup> after he attended Mass in the "little Roman church" and hearing the priest try to get his congregation part with some of their wealth for the benefit of the church or to adorn the otherwise plain statue of Our Lady. Quite possibly the Sisters found it just as hard to get contributions towards the education of their sons and daughters. The visitation of the Sisters of 1912 notes how they mainly earned their upkeep by extra music and commercial classes outside school time!<sup>31</sup>

## School life

Little is known of what school was like, what was taught or how it was taught, till we find the Inspector's Report of 1905. But we did notice earlier that some of the boys were trained as altar servers. We'll note when reviewing the nature of the Catholic Church at the time that girls were not considered for training as altar servers!

Part of training was for the boys to learn off by heart the Latin responses to the prayers at Mass. While children from the Australian mainland and any from the Philippines would have been aware that the language of the Mass was Latin, it is interesting to imagine the reaction of Islander families and Islander boys to learning "*Ad deum qui laetificat juven tutum meum*," and much more besides! It was common for boys on the mainland to learn the Latin responses without knowing what they meant; and it might well be imagined that these early pupils of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School did the same.

## The Catechism

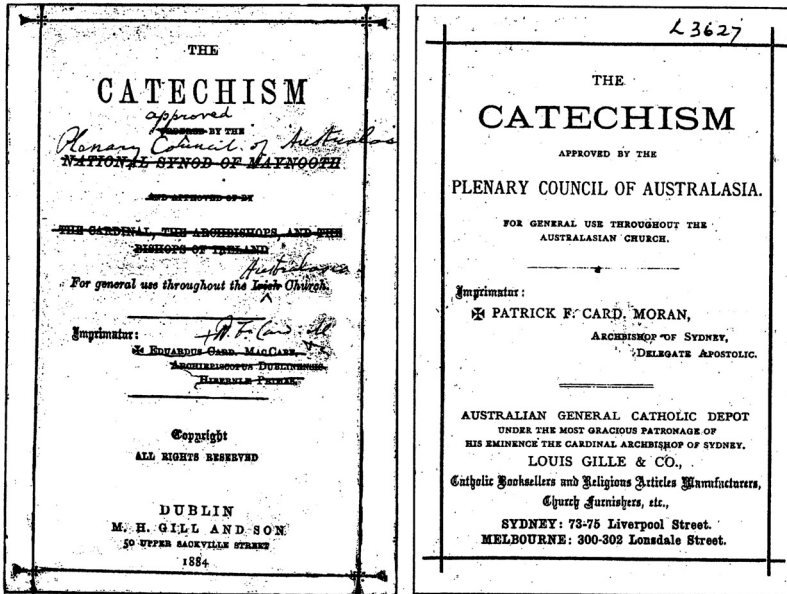
"Learning the Catechism" was part of growing up Catholic throughout Australia from the 1880s to the 1950s. As can be seen from the facsimiles of the covers of the Irish Catechism of 1884 and the Australian Catechism of a year or two later, the Australian Catechism is virtually the Irish Catechism with the cover changed.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.303.

<sup>30</sup> Nisbet, Hume, *A colonial tramp: travels and adventures in Australia and New Guinea*, London, George Bell and Sons, 1896 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 337. This book had been first published in 1896.

<sup>31</sup> This reference is reproduced in facsimile in another chapter.





Cardinal Moran of Sydney, on behalf of the Bishops of Australia, organised for 50,000 of these to be printed. It became known as “The Penny Catechism”. Now while Thursday Island and the Torres Strait were under the ecclesiastical control of the Vicariate Apostolic of Melanesia and Micronesia, it’s speculated that Sister Margaret would have obtained copies of this *Australian* catechism for use in the school. It was customary to require the pupils to learn “off by heart” the answers in the catechism. This would almost certainly have been the custom at the Sacred Heart School.<sup>32</sup>

It was the custom for the youngest children to use slates and slate “pencils” when learning for form letters and to write. When they progressed to lead pencils they would have written exercises in “Copy Books” where examples of copperplate writing were to be “copied” in lines below the examples. What reading books there were prior to the introduction of the *Queensland School Readers* in 1915 is not known. Other classroom practices are speculation.

### Speculation



The Copy Book pages are from “Vere Foster’s Copy Books” popular in Australia in the 1890s.

### Mother Ligouri Debroux

The photo is of Mother Ligouri Debroux who was at Sacred Heart School for 6 months in 1887. She travelled to T.I. with Sister Margaret. Later in 1898 it is Mother Ligouri who writes a lengthy letter (18 pages) back to Mother Marie Louise in France, reporting on the different Missions including Thursday island at that time.



<sup>32</sup> It’s interesting to note that 60 or so years later the Bishop then overseeing the school required that the answers be learned by heart: “The portions of the catechism set are to be learned by heart in all grades”, Letter from Bishop’s House, Cairns, 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1954.

## The Builder Brothers

Thanks to the detailed research of Father James Littleton, MSC, we now know the background stories of the Brothers who physically built the convent, the presbytery, the original chapel, the orphanage and the hospital.<sup>33</sup> They presumably had helpers, of course, but to them we owe enormous gratitude for the physical construction of the Mission's buildings. The following passages are taken from Father Littleton's work verbatim:<sup>34</sup>



**Brother Guiseppe de Santis** arrived with Fathers Navarre and Hartzler on October 24, 1884. In January 1886 he accompanied Father Verjus to Yule Island. Nine years later he left the MSC and joined a farming community in northern NSW.

**Brother Mariano Travaglini** was born in Italy in 1863. He arrived in Sydney as a novice in the company of Fathers Couppe and Verjus in January 1885. He accompanied Verjus to Thursday Island where he took his first vows on April 12, 1885. Some years later he transferred to Yule Island. He died in Florence, Italy in 1943. (The photo of the Brother with his arms folded is of Brother Mariano, and was supplied by Brother Brendan Delaney MSC, of Kensington Monastery.)

**Brother Nicola Marconi** was born in Italy in 1886. Like Travaglini he arrived in Sydney as a novice in the company of Fathers Couppe and Verjus in January 1885. At the time he was only 18 years of age. He took his first vows as an MSC on April 12, 1885 on Thursday island. He accompanied Father Verjus to Yule Island in June 1885 and remained in New Guinea until his sudden death in 1893 at the age of 27. (No photo available)

**Brother Salvatore Gasbarra** (pictured)<sup>35</sup> was born in Italy in 1864. Like Marconi he too arrived in Sydney as a novice in the company of Fathers Couppe and Verjus in January 1885. He took his first vows as an MSC on Thursday Island on April 12, 1885. Later that year he accompanied Father Verjus to Yule Island and worked in Papua for the rest of his life. Locally he was known as Brother Kala. He died at Veifa'a, New Guinea in 1945.

**Brother Constant van Cam** was born in Antwerp, Netherlands in 1858 and took his first vows as a Missionary of the Sacred Heart in 1890. The date of his arrival on Thursday Island is uncertain, but he died and was buried there in 1903. (No photo available)



## Direct link to the earliest Brothers

As mentioned, the photos of Brothers Mariano and Salvatore were supplied by Brother Brendan Delaney in March, 2012. This followed a telephone request from Brother Barry to search for photos of the Brothers. The direct link is that Brother Brendan met Brother Salvatore at Douglas Park, then the Novitiate for young men training to join the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Brother Brendan was a novice, and the time was the 1930s. Brother Salvatore was taking a rare trip back to Europe after more than 40 years in the "missions."

<sup>33</sup> Littleton, James, M.S.C., *Sacred Heart Mission Torres Strait 1884-1967*, Fyshwick, ACT, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Pages 29-30

<sup>35</sup> Photo supplied by Brother Brendan Delaney MSC, Kensington Monastery, Syd<sup>35</sup> Photo supplied by Brother Brendan Delaney MSC, Kensington Monastery, Sydney.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Sisters' origins and mission

The founding Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School were the “Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart” and were founded by Father Jules Chevalier (pictured) in 1874. Father Chevalier had founded the Order of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart twenty years earlier, in 1854, consisting of both Priests and Brothers. One of Chevalier's guiding principles was to see that in Jesus, God loves people with a *human heart*, and that he is the answer to their hopes, their questionings, their every need.<sup>1</sup>



One writer explained the spirituality this way: *“Our heart spirituality calls us to imitate Jesus, so that everyone we encounter will discover through us, the strength of his love to support them in their fragility, and the gentleness of his love to bring them the compassion and understanding for which they long. We are the hands and feet, and especially the heart of Jesus in our world.”*

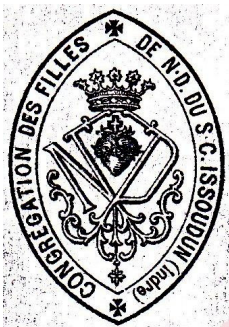
The motto of the congregation, Priests Brothers and Sisters is: *“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved.”* It was a custom to write these words at the top of a page when writing a letter.

Community life of the Sisters centres around the Eucharist. As apostolic religious, women who are called to live in union with Mary, the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus, they strive to integrate the contemplative and apostolic elements in all aspects of their religious life.



*“... We are sent by the Church to make known the strong and merciful love of God revealed in his Heart. In a missionary spirit, strengthened by the charism of Father Chevalier, we remain open to the needs of our world and the demands of particular cultures. We endeavour to make our own the hopes and anxieties of the people of our times especially those who are poor, suffering, or deprived in any way.”* (FDNSC Constitutions 80)

Chevalier encouraged the Sisters to embrace the risk of *“mission without limits.”*

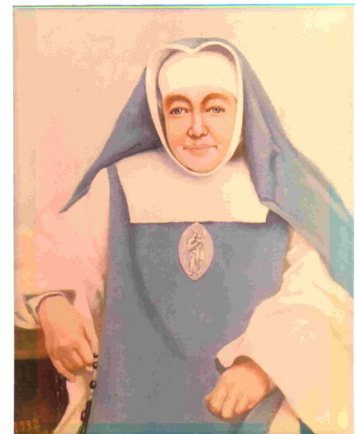


In 1882, Fr. Chevalier appointed Marie Louise Hartzer in charge of the community of Sisters. On 9th September, 1884, the first profession ceremony took place, including that of Marie Louise. The Congregation now had 5 professed members. Just two years later, in 1884, on October 17th, five sisters set out for the great mission of Oceania. Two had made their vows only a few hours before. They had the great sum of 25 francs between them, (out of which had to be bought a pair of shoes for one person in Marseille)! What faith!<sup>2</sup>

For twenty-six years, until her death in 1908, Marie Louise wisely guided the infant Congregation.

#### Mother Marie-Louise Hartzer

Who was this founding superior of the Sisters and what spirit did she bequeath to the fledgling congregation? Born in Alcasce, which was a territory between France and Germany and disputed between the two, her early life was greatly disturbed by a war that was raging at the time. She married and had two sons, but her husband died leaving her to raise her boys in difficult circumstances. When her sons had grown up they asked if they could join this new congregation, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.



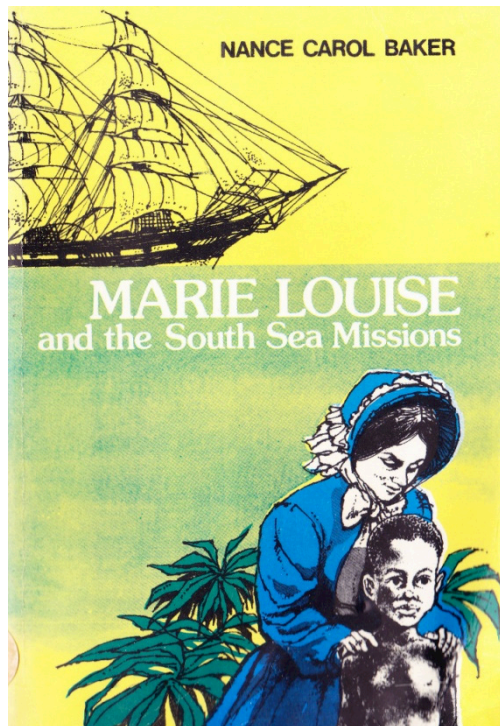
<sup>1</sup> These notes are taken from various sources on the internet, placed there by the Priests and Sisters and copied in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from the internet, 2011.



Marie-Louise believed they were too young and first of all resisted, but finally agreed. Soon after, Marie-Louise, now in her 40s, felt drawn to the Sisters and asked if she could join.

Seeing that Marie-Louise had great life experience and wisdom, Father Chevalier asked her to be the first Superior of the Sisters. She complained that, "*all I know is how to make a home!*" And on reflection what a tremendous foundation the ability to "make a home" is in the early formation of a Religious family!



Most of the sisters she was now to train were to follow the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart to unknown lands across the seas, and to share in their work. At times they would have to live in dire poverty; sickness and death would dog their footsteps, heat and fever would sap their energy and try their patience; perils by land and sea would be their daily lot. The very people they served would often repay them with ingratitude and sometimes with hatred.

In spite of all this, the vision of the crown they were to form must be kept ever in their minds. As they built themselves into life on the missions, their religious ideals must be a-building, too. Therefore, Mother Marie Louise trained her daughters firmly; at the same time, she planted in their hearts the love that casts out fear. It was easy for her to make the sisters feel that they were all members of one family, because she herself had always been the centre of a happy family life. This was the outstanding mark of her work: the family spirit that she gave to her sisters.

So attractive was the life they led, that many young girls asked to join them. Girls from France, Belgium, Holland and Ireland came to be formed by Mother Marie Louise into Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

The illustrations to the left are the cover and a sketch from the novel account of the life of Marie Louise Hartzler written in 1976 by Nance Carol Baker and illustrated by Joan Saint.<sup>3</sup> The sketch is intended to represent a town in old Ascascé, the scene of parts of Marie Louise's early life.

The text, from pages 52 and 53, are the author's imaginings of Marie Louise's training of the Sisters.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, Nance Carol, *Marie Louise and the South Sea Missions*, Saint Paul Press, Homebush, N.S.W., 1976.



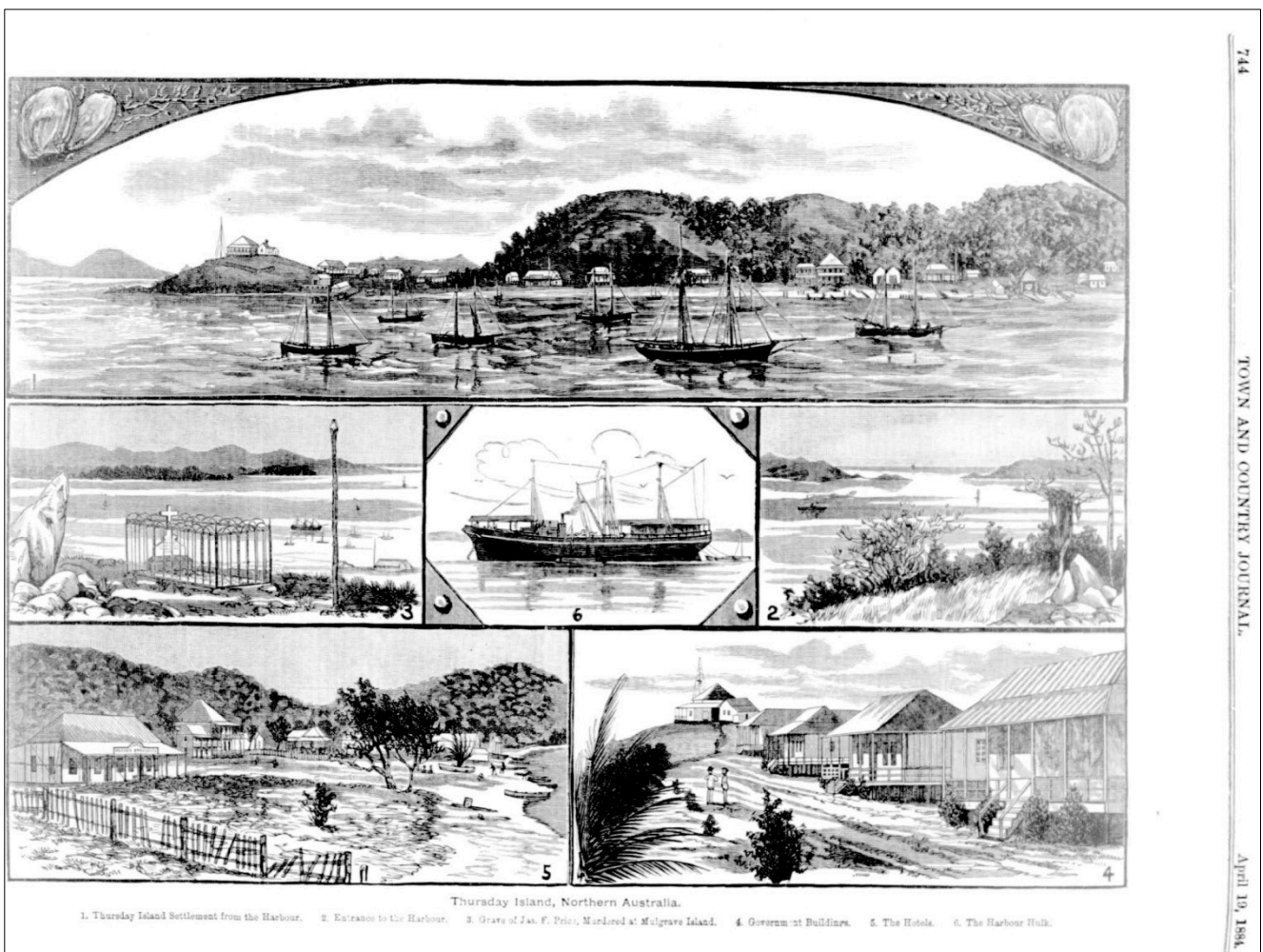
## CHAPTER 3

### Thursday Island at the time – mid-late 1880s

“Far from being a tropical island...”, is the beginning of a description of Thursday Island given in the history of the Sisters on T.I.<sup>1</sup> The description continues:

*“Except for its scattered coconut palms, frangipani and eucalyptus trees, during the greater part of the year it was windswept, barren and dusty. Here and there a few houses with galvanised roofs indicated the direction of an unpaved street or two. Beauty there was, however, in the seascape in front of the mission with the pearl-luggers coming and going or riding at anchor; Horn and Prince of Wales Islands rising from the sea in the near distance and, on a clear day, the faintest outline of Australia’s northernmost point, Cape York.”*

*“Thursday Island, as well as being the government headquarters, was the centre of the Torres Strait pearl-fishing industry. The population consisted of a handful of Europeans and about 800 Filipino and Japanese divers working with the pearling fleets<sup>2</sup> The Filipinos or Manila-men as they were called locally were Catholic and many of them had married Torres Island women. They became very devoted to the Mission and wanted the Sisters to instruct and help their wives and children. The Catholics among the Europeans also wanted the Sisters to commence a Catholic school for their children since, as things then were, they had to send them to the small government school.”*



The sketches are from the *Australian Town and Country Journal* of April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1884<sup>3</sup>, the year the fathers established the Mission; two years before the first Sisters arrived and three years before Sister Margaret Sweeney began the school. Till they built the presbytery the Fathers and Brothers stayed at the McNulty hotel.

<sup>1</sup> *As It Was In The Beginning*, Generalate of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Rome, 1985, p.127.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> p.24.

The sketch N0.5 is entitled “The Hotels”; so one of them is the first residence of the founders of the Sacred Heart Mission. And since we read in another place that the only two-storied building on the island was McNulty’s Hotel, the sketch of the two-storey building is it! And in the short article accompanying the sketches is mention: “*Population: white and black, about 70.*”

There is a traveller’s description of Thursday Island written about this time of the establishment of the Sacred Heart Mission. It may be enjoyable in reading it in facsimile from *The Brisbane Courier* of Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1885<sup>4</sup> reproduced on the next page. Note in passing the reference to the church:

*“Religious devotion has hitherto been sadly neglected; but with commendable perseverance and unanimity the Roman Catholic inhabitants have obtained the services of some priests, who attend to their ecclesiastical duties, and are very energetic, their leisure time being at present occupied in erecting a chapel.”*

Much can be learned about the nature of Thursday Island society from its establishment in 1877 to about 1914 from the *Annual Reports* of the Government Resident. Suffice it to say that the administrative centre of far north Queensland that had been established at Somerset on the eastern tip of Cape York had been transferred to Thursday Island for a number of reasons in 1877. This is the year taken as the beginning of the settlement of Thursday Island. The first Government Resident was Lt. Henry M. Chester, but the most long-lived was Mr. John Douglas who had an enormous influence on the early development of Thursday Island.

We begin, however, with the Report for the year 1887, by *Acting* Government Resident, Hugh Milman:

*“The township of Port Kennedy [as the settled area of the Island was called] has been during the year in a fairly prosperous state, and the efforts of the Torres Divisional Board are beginning to bear fruit in the shape of streets, culverts, and pathways, towards which end the Board has had the use of prison labour for a short period. Much, however, remains to be done, the income of the Board being small, so the improvements have to be effected gradually as the state of the Boards funds permit.”*

*“Several buildings have been erected, and ornamental trees erected along the Victoria Parade and in various parts of the town, which in a few years will considerably enhance the natural beauties of the settlement.”*

A reference to the Church is as follows:

*“The Roman Catholics have a neat little chapel, and the head of their mission has lately been appointed a bishop.”*

This reference to “little” chapel indicates that it is a small building that pre-dates the present (2012) church. Note the sketch, based on an early photograph, shows just three windows and a round window above the main door.

(The house in the photo/sketch is the presbytery.)

“Wanderer” had another article about Thursday Island printed in the *Sydney Echo* of 27/10/1885. He describes some of the buildings on T.I. of the time:

*“For the inhabitants of Port Kennedy the age of brick and stone has not yet been reached. They still lodge in tabernacles of tin – a few of their most cherished institutions have been and are housed in timber. The [State] schoolhouse is a good substantial wooden building; so is not the bank, though a new bank is projected – a bank which will cut out Government House itself. Nor is the church yet of timber. It is still a tabernacle of tin, though with some architectural distinctions; and late and early, every morning and evening, since I have arrived on the island I hear the tintinnabular summons to prayer of the good fathers of the French Mission.”*



<sup>4</sup> Page 6

This is just before the arrival of the first French Sisters; so there is not any reference to a convent or convent school. The “tintinnabular summons” almost certainly would have been the traditional Angelus bell that is rung at 6.00am, midday and at 6.00pm.

The diary entry of another visitor to Thursday Island<sup>5</sup>, who was on the island when the *Sydney Echo* article appeared, greatly enjoyed his visit. His delight may have been enhanced by the very warm welcome he received (not only from Maggie McNulty) and the fact that he was able to idle at his leisure. But almost everyone he met and the ramblings he undertook pleased him. His brief description included:

*“The town is not laid out with any regularity; the modern bungalows, surrounded by balconies and verandahs, and all built on piles, are just dotted down anywhere in the sand and inland from it, a good many being drinking shanties and billiard saloons.”*

He described how the Federal Hotel, under the proprietorship of Mrs. McNulty, had a very unmistakable Irish flavour in its decorations and portraits of various Irish republican heroes. He was most taken by the views from “*the hill behind the town*” which he described in poetic terms. He concluded:

*“Why it is quite a lovely place, and the more I have seen of it the more I have admired it. I know no prettier spot anywhere about Australia. Sky, sea and land, it is all beautiful.”*<sup>6</sup>

A somewhat similar description is given by A.A. Gordon<sup>7</sup> in his diary entry of 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1889, written during his journey around the world:

*“Sand predominates everywhere, but the higher parts are covered with scrub. There are a few tin houses inhabited by one or two whites, some blacks, Malays & Cingalese. The only nice house I saw was Mr. Douglas’, the Government resident. Everywhere seemed scorched; ...”*

Hartmann<sup>8</sup> writing in 1887 mentions:

*“This is one of the busiest parts of the earth, where all races and all colors are represented which the various climes produce, in all the different shades, from the white European to the polished black African negro; the sailors, divers, and servants generally, all colored people, dressed in bright and rainbow colored garments in which that class so greatly delight. The water near the beach is very shallow, causing the boats to remain a considerable distance from the dry land, so that ladies or gentlemen are carried by their colored sailors to and from their boats; or gentlemen with their trousers tucked up wading through the shallow water, thus giving the whole scene a most picturesque and interesting appearance”*

*“Torres Straits has not only charming scenery as a recommendation, but also a splendid and healthy climate, a pure atmosphere, with an invigorating sea breeze all the year round. During the whole of the winter months particularly, the climate is simply delicious, and so mild that a bath in the open sea is most enjoyable every day.”*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Mackellar, C.D., *Scented Isles and Coral Gardens -- Torres Straits, German New Guinea, and the Dutch East Indies*, London, John Murray, 1912, p.24.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>7</sup> Manuscript kept in the State Library of Queensland, Box 6058.

<sup>8</sup> Hartmann, C.H., *Travels and Adventures in the Gulf Country and New Guinea*, Toowoomba, G & J Black, General Printers, 1887, p.4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.5.



## Thursday Island and its Surroundings.

BY WANDERER.

To visit Torres Straits had long been my desire, yet until recently I could not spare the time nor had I the opportunity to do so. The tropical sun also in a measure deterred me making the attempt during the summer months, hence my choosing that period of the year when one could enjoy some little personal comfort and participate in any of the social pleasures or gaieties that might be going on.

Thursday Island is the central and smallest of the Prince of Wales group, situated, as your readers may know, a few miles north of Cape York—the most northern extremity of Australia. The entrance and passage to the anchorage between Thursday and Horn islands is picturesque, but the greatest drawback first noticeable to all strangers is the absence of a pier or jetty, which necessitates going ashore in a waterman's boat, and these aquatic "jehus," mostly coloured men, are (to use a colonial expression) "cheeky"—of course there may be exceptions—and owing to the want of a boat jetty you have to mount a darkie steed to gain *terra firma*.

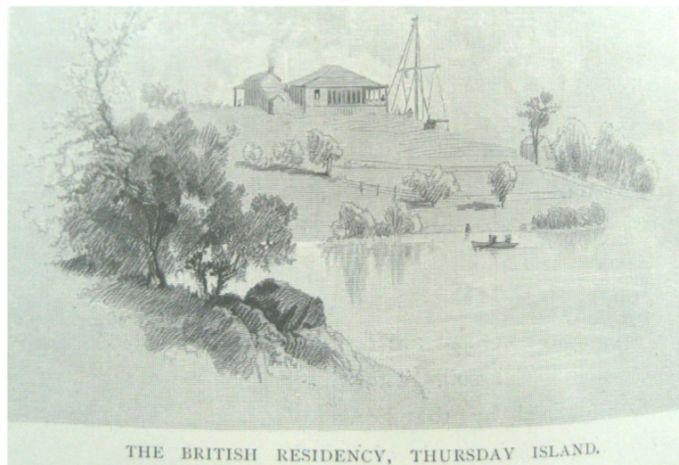
Thursday Island cannot boast of much; it is not fertile, and water is exceedingly scarce; the buildings are all constructed of wood and iron, and with the exception of Mr. McNulty's hotel have but the ground floor. The Government buildings are all at one end of the beach on rising ground; along the beach and flat, extending thence to the small hills at the back, lies the township, in which the wanderer will find two public-houses or hotels, four stores, the bank, and a boat-building establishment. Of the hotels, McNulty's is the largest and most patronised, and of the stores Messrs. Burns, Philp, and Co.'s is the most extensive. This firm appears to dabble in all sorts of business; their store is a general one; they own one of the three hulks which lie in the anchorage; carry on the agency for the several lines of China steamers, are buyers of *bêche-de-mer* and pearls, and do general isocommon business. The bank (Queensland National) has but recently opened and does a fair amount of business. This institution appears to have had a magical effect in many ways; especially so on the paper money (commonly known among Thursday Islanders as *shinplasters*) hitherto circulated by a prominent local firm, and upon which a discount of 5 per cent was charged by other business men.

The society of Thursday Island is very mixed, for its inhabitants consist of members of nearly all the different races on the face of our globe, and, as in many other small places I have visited, there are to be found some who, being possessed of a little more "filthy lucre" or presumption than others, fancy they must be composed of better clay

than others, fancy they must be composed of better clay than their fellows, and therefore aspire to be the "élite;" and, to maintain their fond aspirations, have resorted to forming themselves into a clique, which like glass is fragile. The middle class are thrifty and hard-working, moving in their own circle, and carefully avoiding intercourse with the self-dubbed aristocracy, and seem the more estimable class of the two. The other portion of society consists of aboriginals, Cingalese, Ethiopians, Arabians, Chinese, Japanese, Malays, Creoles, and Polynesians, who have to meekly submit to many acts the legality of which is questionable.

Religious devotion has hitherto been sadly neglected; but with commendable perseverance and unanimity the Roman Catholic inhabitants have obtained the services of some priests, who attend to their ecclesiastical duties, and are very energetic, their leisure time being at present occupied in erecting a chapel. A service for members of the Protestant denomination is held on board of one of the vessels in harbour each Sunday, and is announced by the funeral tolling of a bell and the hoisting of a flag, which, however, fails to attract anything like a congregation. Were this service conducted on shore, as at other places, many, especially families, would attend; whereas they are now debarred, as it would cost each individual 5s. for boat hire, which would impoverish the purse too much to allow them to give any contributions to the offertory, which, I presume, is collected to cover the minister's stipend.

The Hon. John Douglas, who was recently appointed Government Resident, arrived a few weeks back, and some days after Mr. Chester, who for many years had conducted the Government business, left for the South. No public demonstration was made on either occasion, but a few days after the Hon. John Douglas had assumed his official duties a reception dinner was given to him. In other places, on similar occasions, a public banquet is the rule, but in this instance such was not the case, as several old and respected residents were ignored by the promoters. The Court-house was utilised as the banqueting hall.



THE BRITISH RESIDENCY, THURSDAY ISLAND.

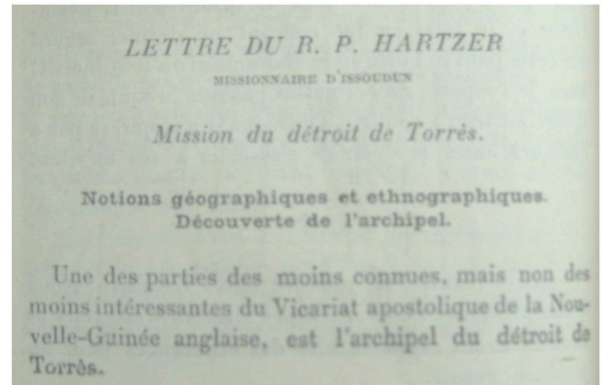
(The Brisbane Courier, Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1885, p. 6)



## Description by Father Fernand Hartzer



Father Fernand Hartzer, wrote a detailed description of Thursday Island and the establishment of the “Sacred Heart Mission” in a “Letter” (in French) to an international Catholic journal of the time, the *Annales de Propagation de la Foi*.<sup>10</sup> The article, published in 1894, featured two very interesting illustrations; one of a street and the other of the church (“Eglise”). They are reproduced here.



Those who know Thursday Island would realise that the sketch of the street could have been drawn from the front verandah of the Sisters’ convent or the priests’ presbytery, because of the obvious elevation of the sketcher’s position.

Luckily we also have some visitors’ descriptions and comments of T.I. very close to the time of the Sisters’ arrival and the start of the school. One is from Hugh Hastings Romilly<sup>11</sup>. His account includes some illustrative sketches. His description reproduced here in facsimile introduces us to the reality of the heavy drinking and drunkenness that is often mentioned by observers at this time of T.I.s history.<sup>12</sup>

The appearance of the settlement, from the police magistrate’s house, is certainly very pretty. Small and large islands are visible everywhere, and on them the houses, some of them very large and comfortable, of the master shellers. The little town on Thursday Island itself is, however, not so agreeable. It is composed chiefly of stores and grog shanties. There seem to be no regulations here against supplying the natives with drink. It is impossible to walk along the only street without seeing many of them speechlessly, some violently, drunk. Not that this condition is confined by any means to the natives alone. I have always noticed that, starting from Brisbane to go north, along the Queensland coast, the amount of drink consumed seems to increase largely, till it reaches the maximum at Thursday Island. However, if they drink a good deal there, they can stand a good deal. To an Englishman it is a somewhat curious experience to be stopped in the street by a perfect stranger, and almost dragged into some grog shop to drink, at all hours of the day.



But railing against the fondness of Thursday Islanders for drink is most strenuously expressed by Hartmann<sup>13</sup> whose travels were published in 1887, the year the Sisters arrived. The reader may enjoy (or be disgusted by) the very emotive language and the most arrogant air of white superiority.

<sup>10</sup> Hartzer, F. *Annales de Propagation de la Foi*, Tome 66.

<sup>11</sup> Romilly, Hugh Hastings, *The Western Pacific and New Guinea*, London, John Murray, 1886.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, P.169.

<sup>13</sup> Hartmann, C.H., *Travels and Adventures in the Gulf Country and New Guinea*, Toowoomba, G & J Black, General Printers, 1887, p.4.



The only drawback to the pleasant scene is the horrible and degrading vice of drunkenness which is always visible here and indulged in by all classes alike, white, yellow, or black. Of all the places I have visited in my travels Thursday Island is the spot where the "Lords of Creation," from all parts of the globe, prove themselves to be much nearer the "Brutes, than the Lords of Creation." They are miserable slaves to their physical passions, and running headlong with express speed to misery here and hereafter. Every time I beheld the disgusting sight of seeing white men drunk amidst the so-called heathen, I could not shake off a feeling of degradation which crept over me, that I too belonged to the

white civilized Christian races which indulged to so large an extent in such soul-deadening vices, without shame before those poor uncivilized heathen. What impression does it make upon them to see their superiors in such a state—the class which should be an example and a model of everything that is good? They are a model indeed, because that very vice of drunkenness is soonest adopted by the poor undeveloped darkies, who very soon feel the effects of the poisonous influence. They become sickly, lazy, and demoralised, shifting from one master to another till a premature death carries them off. Who is to blame? However, I am pleased to find that Mr. Douglas, the present Police Magistrate, is using all his energy to put down this evil with an iron hand; and being a total abstainer himself is, with a good staff of officials at his right hand, able to give a proper example. His influence no doubt will soon be felt. Torres

Another reference to excessive drinking comes from a travelling actor, Daniel E. Bandmann, writing in 1886<sup>14</sup>. From the title of his book it is clear that he travelled the world presenting Shakespeare. His observations included:

*"The coral pearl-fishers of T.I. are rather a rough lot; they make money easily and freely and like to enjoy themselves, though it is sad to say that the highest felicity of these boisterous fellows is in excessive drinking."*

### Public houses, empty bottles and tins

Another tiny insight into the society into which the Sisters found themselves is contained in a remark from the Government Resident, John Douglas:

*"The Hon. John Douglas stated in one of his annual reports that, when he arrived at Thursday Island in April, 1885, there were only a few scattered houses. He added:- 'There*

*were two public houses, behind one of which there was a huge mound of bottles testifying to the achievements of those who had lived in the pre-historic times.' If the early pearl shellers were not allowed to live on Thursday Island they evidently visited the settlement frequently."*<sup>15</sup>

There were empty tins, too:

*"The streets of Port Kennedy, I observe, are still irregular, and there are in places the most wonderful collections of bottles and discarded tins. More than one of these pyramids of past habits may be seen in the vicinity of*



<sup>14</sup> Bandmann, Daniel E., *An actor's tour: or seventy thousand miles with Shakespeare*, Brentano Brothers, New York, 188, p.261.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, Stanley, *The Establishment of Thursday Island*, Qld Geographical Journal, vol .41, 1924-26. Ref: S919.43/005

*the public-houses. They testify to an abnormal consumption of beer and tinned meats.*"<sup>16</sup>

## Official ideas of white superiority

It's interesting to note the tone of "white superiority" in the Reports of the Government Resident. This was the thinking of Europeans of the time, particularly those holding government office. Readers may be unfamiliar with the expression "White man's burden". This was an expression in the nineteenth century with the meaning that the "white man" had the burdensome task of civilising the natives of Africa, India and elsewhere. Whenever the population figures are given there is a comment on the proportion of "whites" to others, with an underlying implication that sustaining a predominance of white numbers is desirable.

## Alleged arrogance of Islanders

It is ironic, in the light of the foregoing, to read the following observations concerning the Islanders. Hugh Hastings Romilly, writing in 1886<sup>17</sup>, suggests that "the native", having amassed good money and not being able to obtain, back in his original island home, "*the grog he is so passionately fond of*", is inclined to stay at Thursday Island. He is said by Romilly to have a disregard of the authority of the chiefs he may have been previously afraid of and defiant of the white men on the island:

*"They are overbearing of the white men, and make others so, and are the cause of endless disturbances. They very soon get a following, and they are altogether very much like the young man in the novels of the present day, who leaves his unsophisticated family, and quiet abode in the country, etc., and returns by-and-by to overwhelm them with his smart London ways."*

He goes on to say, however that he, "the native", fears "... the energetic police magistrate" [Mr. Chester].

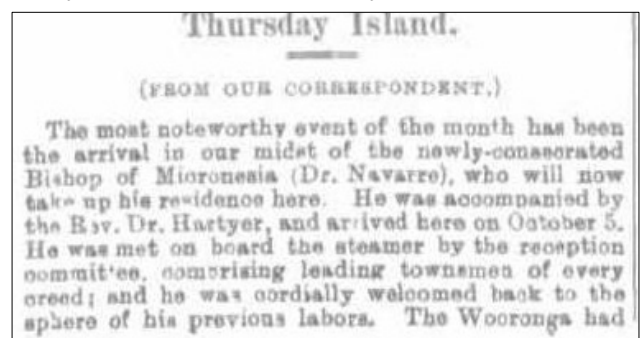
*"He is one of the few people who do not look upon them as the lords of creation, and the noble savage who treats his master in so supercilious a manner is, in the presence of Mr. Chester, as meek as a lamb, nor would it be supposed that butter would melt in his mouth."*

He concludes his observations on his visit to Thursday Island with a remark that is interesting considering the subsequent history of liquor and indigenous people in Australia generally and on Thursday Island in particular. He gives as his opinion<sup>18</sup>: "*I shall be glad to see the time when, as in other places, regulations are made in Thursday Island, prohibiting the sale of spirits to natives.*"

All the foregoing might be kept in mind when considering the background of some of the children the Sisters would have had in their classes and the parents whose cooperation they would have been seeking. The Australian Sister, Margaret Sweeney, the first teacher of the children, would have known the propensity of mainland Australians to enjoy the occasional cold one, but maybe her French community members could have been a little astonished to observe the drinking habits of the locals.

## 1888 Reception for Bishop Navarre

The extraordinary reception afforded to the newly consecrated Bishop Navarre, who had only recently, since 1884, been the Parish Priest of Thursday Island, tells something of the esteem of the priests and the Sacred Heart Mission generally at the time. The extract from the *Town and Country Journal* (pictured) of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1888, continues:



*"The Wooronga had flags flying from stem to stern, and every house of business as well as the small craft in port who had flags to fly did so. On landing he was met by a number of his parishioners and welcomed to the Mission Chapel, where he was received by the mission fathers and sisters. The usual religious ceremonies took place in the Mission Chapel. Subsequently our popular Resident, Mr. Milman, in a few well-chosen words congratulated the Bishop upon his elevation, and on behalf of the 4 residents welcomed him back to the scene of his future labours."*

<sup>16</sup> "Wanderer", *Sydney Echo*, 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1885.

<sup>17</sup> Romilly, Hugh Hastings, *The western Pacific and New Guinea*, London, John Murray, 1886, p.166.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p.167.



After mentioning the concert presented by the school children (described in an earlier chapter) the report continues:

*"It is now almost four years since the Mission Fathers first established themselves on the island; and the erection of a substantial chapel and presbytery, with a convent for the sisters, besides the fencing in and terracing and planting of their grounds, gives evidence of their industry and energy in the material parts of their calling; while their attention to the spiritual part is evident in the regular attendance at services of large congregations of worshipers, whose shades of colour vary from the fallow complexion of the white residents to the jet black of the Torres Straits natives."*

## Connection to the world

Further developments on Thursday Island are mentioned in the Report on 1887:

*"The connection of the island with the rest of the world by the completion of the telegraph line along the Cape York Peninsular has considerably altered the feeling of the community of being so much out of the world, and has brought with it what has marked another step in the history of the settlement, namely, the starting of a local paper, so that all can now feel en rapport with the rest of the world and keep themselves up with the times."*<sup>19</sup>

## Population

Many reports of Thursday Island tell of the multitude of national backgrounds of the residents from the earliest times. A vivid example of this is in one of these Annual Reports of the Government Resident of 1888 or 1889. He lists those who have passed through the gaol so as to "give some idea of the heterogeneous material the police have had to deal with" :

English	Danes	West Indian	Burmese
Scotch	Italians	Manilla men	Africans
Irish	Norwegian	Malays	Cingalese
German	Russian	Chinese	Mauritius
French	Natives of Australia	Javanese	Kanakas
Bengalese	Brazilian	Egyptian	Japanese
	Aboriginals		

So this was the surrounding society in which the school, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, began, and the milieu in which the Sisters began their work.

## Newspaper begins in 1897

*The Torres Strait Pilot and New Guinea Gazette* began publication on Thursday Island in 1897 and, as we shall see, thanks to copies being held in the Queensland State Library, much insight can be gained into Thursday Island society of the time by following the local stories contained in its pages. Whether the Sisters purchased copies of the newspaper to keep abreast of affairs is not known.



<sup>19</sup> The newspaper was *The Torres Strait Pilot and New Guinea Examiner*, owned and edited by Alexander Corran, for many years Mayor of Thursday Island and occasional attendee at School functions.

## Story of the *Torres Strait Pilot* and Alexander Corran



The guiding genius behind the *Torres Strait Pilot*, or *The Pilot*, as it came to be called, was Alexander Corran (1861-1940). He was long-time Mayor of Thursday Island and features in many of the photos of openings of buildings, including Convent school buildings, and also at any ceremonies conducted on the island during his time. He seems always to have worn a white suit for these occasions. The editorials of *The Torres Strait Pilot* and *New Guinea Gazette* are presumed to have been written by him. He always seems favourable to the Convent school and wrote in defence of their teaching of some New Guinea boys in 1897.

Margaret Lawrie, a great researcher of the customs and stories of the Torres Strait, wrote the following passage as part of a biographical sketch of Alexander Corran -- one of the “characters” of Thursday Island for many years.

*“Alexander Corran (1861-1940), printer and newspaper editor, was born on 17 November 1861 at West Derby, Lancashire, England, son of William Corran, printer, and his wife Margaret, née Gill, both from the Isle of Man. Having learned his trade, Alexander migrated to New South Wales in 1883 and subsequently shifted to Queensland. At East Brisbane on 3 June*

*1885 he married Manx-born Mary Ann Kelly with the forms of the Churches of Christ; they were to have four children. A first-class printer, he worked in various Brisbane offices until 1893 when the bank crashes and the depression forced him into bankruptcy. He moved north and was briefly editor of the Gladstone and Port Curtis Advertiser before settling on Thursday Island in 1896. Corran took over the Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette, a four-page weekly newspaper. From 1914 he gradually replaced it with the daily Pilot, a single quarto sheet, printed only on one side, said to be 'the smallest newspaper in the world'. He continued to edit it until his death in 1940.”<sup>20</sup>*



### Thursday Island.

December 21.

ALL PREPARATIONS have been made for the festive season of Xmas 1889; and never have the colored boys of the Straits had such opportunities of spending their cash. A merry-go-round, two swing boats, an Anglo-Japanese troupe, a Bruce auction and two grand concerts are among the many inducements offered to the boys. The boats have been coming in very freely during the past two days; and it is estimated that nearly 100 tons of shell will have been brought in for the next shipment.

THE STEAMER OTTO arrived with four more lepers for the station at Damien Island. The men were brought up in a house on deck, and not allowed to leave it.

HAMMOND ISLAND GOLDFIELD continues in the same satisfactory condition. But nothing of consequence can be done until a machine is put on the field. Warden Douglas has already marked out a machine site, and there is a probability of the machine being here in a month's time.

WE HAVE HAD heavy rains during the last two weeks. It looks very much like a wet Christmas--cheerful, very, for those who have gone to a big expense in catering for the season. Thursday Island of now and Thursday Island of two years ago are different places, shops having sprung up in all directions. All of these seem to do a good business.

THE TABORA arrived from the south this morning, and should take a large shipment of shell to England. The Changsha arrived from Hongkong yesterday.

THE FATHERS of the Sacred Heart Mission are progressing very well with the hospital. The framework is up. When the institution is in working order it will be an excellent thing for the various shelling stations.

The tiny, one-page *Torres Straits Daily Pilot* seems to be most remembered, but from 1897 to 1914 the paper was a large format, four page broadsheet, being available for sale each Saturday. (A facsimile of a 1931 issue of the one-page *Torres Straits Pilot* is reproduced in chapter 9.)

(The photo of ‘The Torres Straits PILOT Newspaper Office’ is taken from a large chart dated 1899 and displayed in metal at Green Hill Fort; hence the rivet)

The accompanying press report headed “Thursday Island, December 21” is from 1889 and appeared on the *Australian Town and Country Journal* of 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1890.

The various headings and paragraphs give a vivid picture of the vibrancy of life on Thursday Island (and Hammond Island) of the time. The reader will be well rewarded for glancing through this interesting piece.





## CHAPTER 4

### The Catholic Church at the time – late nineteenth century

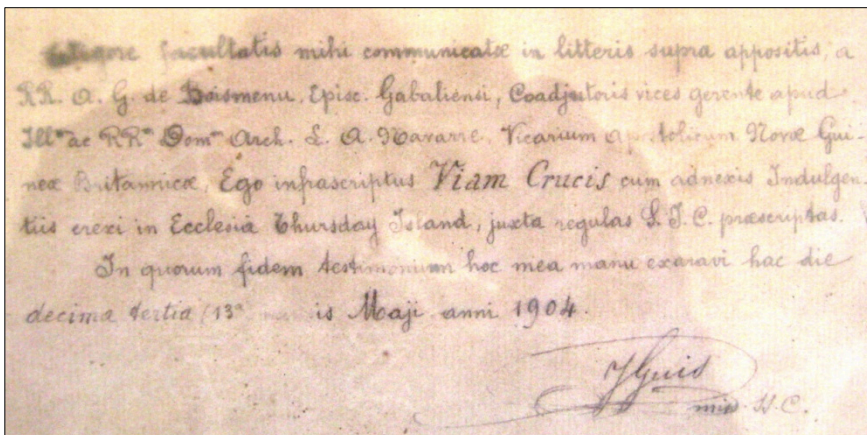
The Catholic Church at the time the Sisters began the school was very “Roman”. Latin was the language of the liturgy, the Mass; and most of the Popes, for several hundreds of years, had been Italian.

The images of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were very European. The statue and window of “Our Lady of the Sacred Heart” were likewise from Europe with European features and clothing. The accompanying photo is of the beautiful window in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, Thursday Island. It has been high on the back wall behind the altar for many years and was restored in 1984 as part of necessary renovations and improvements that will be related in a later chapter.



The Church was very male and clergy oriented. There was little lay participation in Church matters other than assisting in raising money and attending to the physical arrangements of the church – decorating, cleaning etc. Women played a very minor role in the life of the Church and religious Sisters, besides their own apostolate, would often find themselves doing mending, cooking and laundry for the priests. Exactly if or how this may have manifested itself on Thursday Island is not well known, but in the History of the Sisters there is the remark that soon after the three French Sisters arrived in 1886: *“Their first work on Thursday island was to mend the tattered clothes of their missionary brethren.”*<sup>1</sup>

Bishops were surrounded with a lot of pomp and ceremony, and wore ornate clothing for official ceremonies. Altars were often elaborate, “like wedding cakes”, with wooden arches and spires and three grand candle sticks on each side for use during “High Mass”. The priest celebrated Mass with his back to the people, facing the tabernacle.



The practice of “gaining indulgences” was common. An indulgence was the obtaining of a reduction of time in “purgatory”. An indulgence could be gained by reciting a particular prayer or making a “visit to the Blessed Sacrament” or some other act of piety. Often the number of days of indulgence earned was mentioned beside the text of a particular prayer.

Still in a frame on the wall of the priest’s presbytery in 2011 was a document from 1904 of the granting of an indulgence to those who made the Via Crucis (the “Way of the Cross” or the “Stations of the Cross”) in the T.I. church.

The wearing of the “scapular” was widely promoted. Pictured, this was made of small rectangles of cloth and worn on the back and breast supported by narrow tapes. It was an



<sup>1</sup> As It Was In The Beginning, Generalate of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Rome, 1985, p.126.

imitation of the large gown-like scapular that some orders of monks and nuns wore. It was said to have been given by Our Lady to Saint Dominic and was associated with special graces and protection for the wearer. In much of the Catholic world there was a clear division between Catholics and Protestants, often referred to by Catholics as “our separated brethren”. The custom grew up on the mainland that Catholics could not attend services in Protestant churches and “mixed” marriages, that is between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, were severely frowned on.

On the mainland of Australia the majority of the priests in the nineteenth century had come from Ireland and the majority of Catholics in mainland Australia had Irish roots. As a result the government establishment was seen as somewhat alien, having such strong British links. But since the foundation of the Church in the Torres Strait was by French missionaries it did not carry with it any antipathy to the British. This will be later seen in the school readily taking part in civic activities that had a strong British flavour.

Pope Leo XIII (Pope, 1878-1903), the Pope (pictured) in the early years of the mission, came out strongly in favour of the “working class” against the power of unscrupulous employers. And so the Church began to take a prominent role in “social action”, a movement for justice in industrial relations.



It will be seen, as the middle of the twentieth century approaches, there is a movement for “equal pay” for the Islanders and others of mixed race on Thursday Island, and other forms of equality.

Throughout this text it will be sometimes noticed that a Sister is called “Sister M. Francis (or whatever)”. The M is for “Mary”. So all Sisters were named after Mary and bore her name. And it was very common for Sisters to have male names. Amongst the Sisters over the 125 years were Sisters Mark, Osmund, Cyril, Jules, Patrick, Christopher, Matthew, Raphael etc. These names were conferred on the Sister at the time of her profession. Part of the idea of a Sister taking a different name was that with her profession – her taking her first vows in her Congregation – she, as it were, died to her old self and was born to a new self. Since the 1970s or so, some Sisters returned to their baptismal name and shed the male name. It was common, too, for the superior of the community to be addressed as “Mother” while the other sisters were “Sister”.



Processions were a feature of the Catholic Church of the time and in Europe it was very common for these to weave their way slowly through the town or city streets. A common procession was one called “Corpus Christi”, meaning “Body of Christ” in which the Blessed Sacrament was carried by the priest in a monstrance<sup>2</sup>, or decorated holder, and it was the custom for “flower girls” to have baskets of flower petals to throw down on the path or roadway before the priest came past ... so that Jesus would have a flower-strewn pathway to progress over.

In similar processions in honour of Our Lady, a statue might be carried while hymns were sung. A tradition grew up on Thursday Island to either “crown” a statue of Our Lady with a coronet of flowers or to ceremonially lay flowers at the feet of the statue (or both). May was a traditional time for this ceremony, the month of May, in the Catholic Church, being specially devoted to Mary.

A very long-lasting Catholic devotion was the Rosary. This was the recitation of fifty “Hail Marys”, along with other prayers, and made up a garland of 50 “roses” for Mary. A “pair” or Rosary beads was used to count the ten Hail Marys in each “decade”.

There was a devotion to the “The Nine First Fridays” stretching back hundreds of years. The idea was that if one devoutly attended Mass on nine consecutive first Fridays of the month, there were certain graces and promises attached to having completed the nine.



<sup>2</sup> Photo from T.I. church, 2012. This monstrance almost certainly goes back to the very earliest days.

We will see mentions in the story that unfolds of the “Children of Mary”. This was an association of young women with special devotion to Our Lady and special prayers and insignia, particularly a blue cloak. Usually for older girls and young women, it became a common “Sodality” in Australia in the twentieth century.

These were some of the devotional customs of the Catholic Church at the time the Sisters began the school, and almost certainly a number of them would have been passed on to the children and through them to their parents.

The very big transitional times in the life of a young Catholic child were First Confession, First Communion and Confirmation, and these were special times in each child’s life when they were “prepared for” these Sacraments. Each occasion was accompanied by special “dressing up” and followed by a “Communion Breakfast” or other celebration in the form of a feast and party. For Confirmation the Bishop usually attended, adding greater solemnity to the occasion. Decorated “First Communion Certificates” and “Confirmation Certificates” were presented and sometimes put in frames. Some students can still locate their Certificates 50 and 60 years later.

Because of the isolation of Thursday Island and the history of the Catholic Church on T.I. being initially connected closely to the Manilamen (Filipinos) and the form of piety they brought with them, it might be argued that these nineteenth century forms of devotion were seen as the way the Church should always be, and the forms of prayer and devotion to be what should always be continued.





## CHAPTER 5

### Glimpses of the School, 1887-1900

It would be wonderful to have descriptions of what school life was like in the early years of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, but records are scarce and only snatches of images can be gleaned.

It's interesting to note an original preconception giving emphasis to the education of New Guinea children. In his letter to Mother Marie Louise in 1886 or 1887, Father Navarre, the founder of the Mission wrote, *"You know, indeed, Rev. Mother, that our object is to make Thursday Island a centre where we will have schools for the most intelligent of the New Guinea children, boys and girls."*<sup>1</sup>

He adds: *"Side by side with this work among the natives, the Sisters will have to look after the instruction of the children of the white population, which is rapidly increasing here."*

The Hartzler brothers, Father Fernand (who was on T.I. during parts of the 1880s and 1890s) and Father Leopold attest that,

*"Numerous children from Protestants as well as from Catholic families flocked to them [the Sisters], for up till then there had been no school on the island."*<sup>2</sup>

Except for the Douglas boys, mentioned in an earlier chapter, the only other known name from the earliest students to attend the school is Daisy Simpson, a *"little girl of five and a half, who later entered the Novitiate at Sydney and became eventually Mother Mary Albert."*<sup>3</sup>



One most interesting aspect of school life is the establishment, in 1889, just two years after the beginning of the school, of the "St. Henry's Azylum" just a score or so metres further up the hill from the Sisters' convent. The Brothers built it<sup>4</sup>, and it was a two storey building and can be seen in the centre right hand edge of the accompanying photo. The photo above shows the steps leading to, what became known as, "The Orphanage".<sup>5</sup> These steps remained in place till at least the time of writing, viz. 2012.

<sup>1</sup> Hartzler, Fernand and Leopold, *Fire Upon the Earth*, Sydney, E.J. Dwyer, 1948, p.62; translated from the French in approx. 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., P.63. However the statement that there was no school on the island is incorrect. The Thursday Island State School was opened on 13 July 1885, a year before the arrival of the Sisters.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., P.63, footnote.

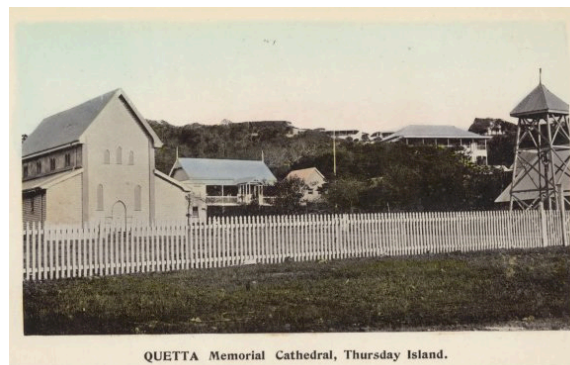
<sup>4</sup> In a letter from Sister Paul quoted in *As It Was In The Beginning*, p.121, we read: *"September 23, 1889. A Beginning has been made on the orphanage or boarding school. Nine children already living there. May 16, 1890. The boys now lodged with the Fathers and come to the Sisters only for meals. ... whilst awaiting the construction of the big building destined for the orphanage, also the newly enlarged convent. The only thing lacking is money."*

<sup>5</sup> The building by the Brothers probably had the help of various Manilamen as we are told that the earlier building of the church and convent was built with their help.

Orphanage



The photo of the original Quetta Memorial Cathedral behind a long picket fence, shows clearly the two story orphanage to the right. The building with the pale blue roof to the immediate right of the cathedral is the [Anglican] “Bishop’s House”, and still stands there, at the time of writing, 2011, possibly 100 years after this photo was taken.



QUETTA Memorial Cathedral, Thursday Island.

The roof at the extreme right seen through the tower is the original Convent school, where the 2012 Mission Hall stands.

The handwritten original guidelines of the purpose and nature of the “Azylum” may be interesting for the reader to enjoy in facsimile. It is reproduced in the following pages.

Reproduced, too, is the first page of the Register of the earliest students accepted into the Orphanage. And so they become some of the first names of pupils of the School that we know. They are:

*John Peope, Theresa Jos, Ambrose Gregory Pavia, Nicolosa Gerinomo or Reneino and Mary Elizabeth Ga.*

(The date of the photo of the children on the steps is unknown. It was supplied by the MSC Archives in Rome. But it shows the uniform and seems to imply that all the children at the “orphanage” at the time of the photo were all girls.)

## The original chapel

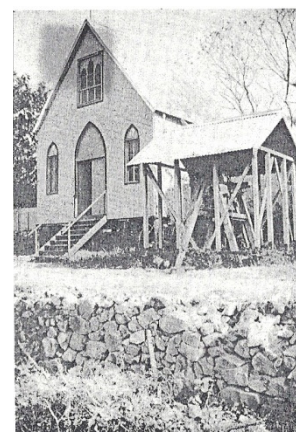


Part of the daily life of the Sisters and the children would have been the chapel which became very familiar to them. What was it like? We have descriptions of it and efforts to decorate it for special occasions thanks to letters that the Fathers and Sisters sent back to France. The Hartzler brothers summarized these letters in the following way:<sup>6</sup>

(Coloured picture shows the section of the poster/calendar of 1897 depicting the “R.C.Church”, and the b & w photo is from the MSC archives in Rome, but is undated.)

*“Little by little they [the Sisters and Fathers] saw the number of the faithful increasing, and the poor mission chapel was becoming daily more frequented. So they planned to make it more attractive and beautiful and they taxed their ingenuity to decorate it as tastefully as possible. It was not an easy task, for the structure of the building lent itself little to decoration. The walls and the roof, minus a ceiling, were of corrugated iron. The woodwork was bare of paint, and the altar, above which was an image of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, was quite in keeping with the poverty of the whole edifice.”*

*“The Sisters, however, succeeded creditably and with little expense; beautiful green plants served to hide the tin walls. The beams were covered with ingeniously-designed banners in the gaudy colours which the natives like so much.”*



The special decorations of the church for one particular Christmas show the imagination of the Manilamen and their special style of religious devotion:

*“One Christmas Day they wished to decorate the church as it is done in the Philippine Islands. A coral mountain was built in the Sanctuary. Inset in this was a cave which was to shelter the wax figure of the Infant Jesus. Mother-of-pearl, rare shells and exquisitely-graceful sea plants brought by the divers from the ocean bed*

<sup>6</sup> Hartzler, Fernand and Leopold, *Fire Upon the Earth*, Sydney, E.J. Dwyer, 1948, p. 64; translated from the French, approx. 1913.



*enriched the grotto with their strange beauty. Strips of material hid the zinc roof and big Chinese lanterns shaped like stars hung here and there, fastened by invisible wires.”<sup>7</sup>*

It should be remembered that a substantial number of the children in the school would have been the children of these men, “[who] *had married black wives from the different tribes round about the Torres Strait regions.*”<sup>8</sup> Their devotional practices would have been greatly influenced by the attitudes and traditions their fathers had brought with them from the Philippines. It’s possible to get some insight into the parentage of the children at the orphanage by noticing their surnames. Some of these are listed towards the end of this chapter.

One visitor writing in 1912<sup>9</sup> notes, “*There are quite a large number of coloured children running about, some of them presenting curious mixtures.*”

### Possible origins of crowning of the Statue of Our Lady

Towards the end of May on Thursday Island and on Hammond Island for many decades<sup>10</sup> there has been the tradition of a procession to Our Lady’s statue and the crowning of the statue with flowers and the laying of flowers at the feet of the statue. It is difficult to pinpoint when this annual tradition began. It may well have begun in the very earliest days of the Mission.

In their biography of their mother, Mother Marie Louise Hartzler, the Hartzler brothers<sup>11</sup>, tell of the tradition begun by their mother in Issoudun in France, to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart which falls on May 28<sup>th</sup>. After describing various devotions during the day they write:

*“... after a hymn had been sung, Mother Marie Louise, in the name of all, would address Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and thank her for all the favours she had given them. Many new petitions would be made, the granting of which was expected with perfect confidence. Then a lovely bouquet of white roses was placed at Our Lady’s feet, and after a hymn of thanksgiving the Sisters renewed together the Consecration of their little Society to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.*



*“When these feasts came round each year, a thousand memories would awaken in the hearts of the missionary Sisters in [sic] Thursday Island, and in their poor chapel, with its badly cut beams and walls of iron, they would carry out the traditions and customs of the Mother House.”*

### Concert for Bishop Navarre, 1888

On October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1888, Father Navarre returned to T.I. as Bishop! Only recently he had been Parish Priest. The *Town and Country Journal* of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1888, gives a very fulsome account of his reception. But let us just note here the contribution of the children:

*“In the evening a performance and concert were given by the children of the settlement, assisted by some lady residents, in honor of the Bishop’s arrival. An audience filled the hall of the School of Arts to overflowing was present. The performance as a whole was a great success, testifying to the care and trouble taken by the Sisters of Mercy [sic]<sup>12</sup> in drilling their little charges.”*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., P.64

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., P.64

<sup>9</sup> Littlejohn, G. S., *More Notes and Reflections on the Road*, The Swift Printing Co. Ltd., Sydney, 1912, p.20.

<sup>10</sup> Till at least the time of writing: 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Hartzler, Fernand and Leopold, *Fire Upon the Earth*, Sydney, E.J. Dwyer, 1948, P.65.; translated from the French, approx. 1913.

<sup>12</sup> Obviously a mistake by the reporter, “our correspondent”. The Sisters, of course, were the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

THURSDAY ISLAND.

## Roman Catholic Asylum

Saint Henry R. C. Asylum is a charitable institution where children of every race & denomination are received to be boarded and educated by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. The Saint Henry R. C. Asylum is situated in the property of the Missionnaires of the Sacred Heart of Thursday Island & belongs to the same society.

It is under the high patronage & direction of his Grace J<sup>r</sup>. Navarre Archbishop of G<sup>r</sup> & Vicar Apostolic of New Guinea & under the patronage of his Lordship J<sup>r</sup>. Henry Jones, Bishop of Lymerica and Vicar Apostolic of New Britain. The members of the board of direction are composed as follows: viz: The Missionnaires of the Sacred Heart appointed by his Grace J<sup>r</sup>. Navarre & Rev<sup>d</sup>. Mother Superiress of the Sisters of Our Lady of the S. H. with the approbation of His Grace J<sup>r</sup>. Navarre.

Children of both Vicariates of New Guinea & New Britain belonging to the society of the Missionnaires of the S. H. are entitled to be received in it.

The fees are One pound (sterling) for each child <sup>monthly</sup> be ~~child~~. Should a child be



DAY ISLAND.  
 Taken away from the Establishment by his parents or others, before he (or she) is 18 years of age, all past expenses not paid off ought to be paid at the above rate.

Passed 18 years of age, boys or girls can be taken away by their parents or Guardians; or a place, employment, or trade, will be provided for them by the establishment, if possible. Should parents or Guardians for a good motive be unable to pay the expenses, children are kept or taken free of charge; provided nevertheless with the conditions above mentioned.

Children can be dismissed from the Asylum and sent away through a good motive, by the Rev. Mother Superiress. The case to be submitted before (or afterwards if necessary) to the members of the Board. — Parents & Guardians to bear all expenses since incurred.

Parents can see their Children with the permission of Rev. Mother Superiress. The hereby mentioned conditions are agreed and accepted by their parents by the very fact that the children are received at the Asylum and their name placed on the rolls together with the signature of one member of the Board of Directors as witness.

The signature of the parents required and witnessed by Rev. Mother Superiress when possible.

Dated this 20<sup>th</sup> June 1889

John H. H. H.  
 20<sup>th</sup> June 1889

Thursday Island



	Child's name	Denomination	when born	where born	Parents Father
n. 1	John Peope	P.C.	5 Sept. 1883	Jerrais Isl.	Hippolyte (Peope)
2.	Elvira Jose	P.C.	about 1880	district of Somerset	Jose (dead)
3.	Ambrose Gregory Tavian	P.C.	4 March 1884	district of Somerset	Ambrose Tavian
4	Nicolosa Geronimo or Rinimo	P.C.	12 September 1885	Thursday Isl.	Petro Geronimo or Rinimo
5	Mary Elizabeth Ga	P.C.	27 October 1884	Thursday Isl.	Carlos Ga

## Mystery photo



the only thing that has faded over the years.

The names of these six Sisters are known but not the date of the photo. They are, top: Sisters Marthe, Madeleine and Agnes and bottom: Sister Lucy, Mother Xavier and Sr. Hyacinth.

Both Sister Marthe and Sister Madeleine were in the T.I. Sisters' community in 1886-7, and so that could be the date. But it could have been a re-union photo at a later time.

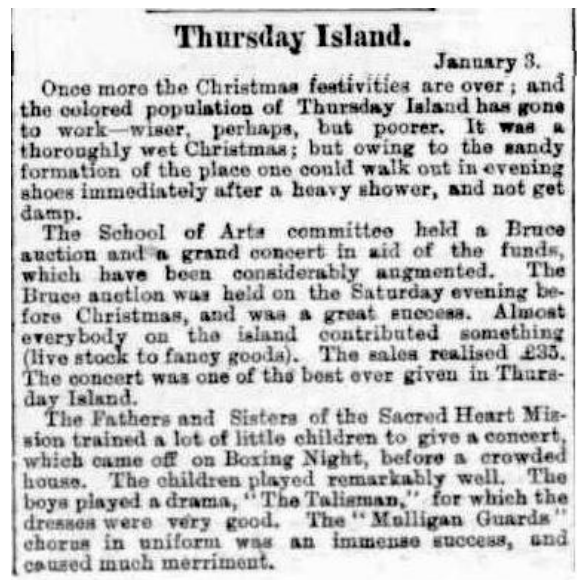
The rock wall behind the Sisters has a familiar look to anyone with knowledge of the area around the T.I. convent. The photo itself is not

## Fun before tragedy ... Boxing Night, 1889

Just two years after beginning the school the Sisters felt they were in a position to present a concert for the citizens of Thursday Island to enjoy. The accompanying press report appeared in the *Australian Town and Country Journal*<sup>13</sup> on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, when, as can be read, T.I. citizens were still enjoying the memory of a "Bruce auction and grand concert" held before Christmas, ... oblivious, of course, that just days away was to be an enormous tragedy and cause of great mourning.

But for the moment there was, "*a concert, which came off on Boxing Day, before a crowded house. The children played remarkably well.*"

*"The boys played a drama, 'The Talisman,' for which the dresses were very good. The 'Mulligan Guards' chorus in uniform was an immense success, and caused much merriment."*



## Impact of the Quetta tragedy, February, 1890



The beautiful photo montage of the wreck and the original ship, the *Quetta*, is lifted in 2011 from the internet posting of the Maritime Archeological Association of Queensland site. Very briefly the sad story<sup>14</sup> is that the passenger ship, the *Quetta*, in February 1890, was en-route to London via Torres Strait after embarking passengers at Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Included among the passengers were 71 Javanese cane

<sup>13</sup> P.17.

<sup>14</sup> Almost word-for-word from the article posted on the net (2011) by the Maritime Archeological Association of Qld.

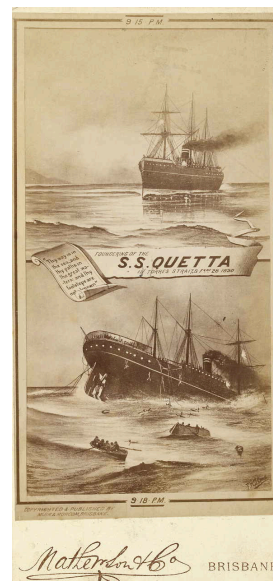


cutters; some with their families who boarded at Mourilyan to return home after working on the North Queensland cane farms. The vessel struck a rock pinnacle in the Adolphus Channel and despite having been built with seven water tight compartments, she sank within three minutes. Of the 290 people aboard, 157 survived.

It can only be imagined what the impact of the sinking of the *Quetta* had on the children of Thursday Island, including those at the Convent school. Surely their thoughts for a considerable time must have turned to death and questions of life after death. It would not be too fanciful to think that the Sisters would have been plied with questions about whether those poor drowned souls would have gone to heaven, etc.

For those whose fathers spent much of their time at sea there would have been the fear that death by capsizing and drowning was always a possibility.

A number of funerals would have left from the Anglican Church (as it was then) immediately beside the Convent schoolrooms. Almost certainly some left from the Catholic Church also.



A long-time resident of T.I., Maggie McNulty, recalled in about 1960<sup>15</sup>: “I remember it vividly, though I was only about five or six at the time. I remember a little girl being brought ashore with two ladies ... they were the only females saved. I wanted my mother to adopt her, but someone else adopted her ... she was a little girl from Scotland.”

A great melancholy must have descended on Thursday Island for some time, and it would have been impossible for the children to escape. As Captain Foley states: “The Quetta disaster had a profound impact on the people of T.I.”<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, a remark about the Catholics on Thursday Island is found in a letter to the *Brisbane Courier* of Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1890,<sup>17</sup> by an Albert A. Maclaren of Thursday Island in relation to the *Quetta*. His letter, given the heading “PROPOSED QUETTA MEMORIAL CHURCH”, proposes that the Church of England build a church in memory of those drowned in the tragedy of the sinking of the ship, the “Quetta”. Part of his letter remarks:

*“With her usual spirit of enterprise the Roman Catholic Church has a strong centre on Thursday island, with a good church, presbytery, convent and schools, and from all I hear their work is highly appreciated by the community generally ...”*

## Fetes and bazaars

The first mention of a great Australian Catholic tradition being established by the Sisters is hidden in two tiny lines at the end of a short report on Thursday Island dated December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1891, in the *Brisbane Courier* of 26<sup>th</sup> December<sup>18</sup>:

“The bazaar in aid of the funds for the new Convent school was a great success.”

And so began a grand tradition of Fetes and Bazaars organized by the Church and School on Thursday Island that would become a feature of Thursday Island life for more than a century. In the following year, 1892, we learn that another bazaar is held. Not only that but opened by the Governor, Sir

**THURSDAY ISLAND, WEDNESDAY.**  
The steamer *Lucinda* returned this afternoon from a cruise to the islands. The Ministerial party landed at three of the islands, meeting the chiefs, and being received heartily. It is rumoured that the purport of the Chief Secretary's visit to Salbal is to consider the advisability of acceding to Sir William McGregor's request that it be handed over to the British New Guinea Government. Sir Samuel Griffith has just opened a fair in aid of the funds of the Sacred Heart Mission Convent. In doing so he referred to the great loss suffered by the mission throughout the untimely death of Bishop Verjus. The *Lucinda* sails south tomorrow. A few of the leading residents will meet the Ministerial party at lunch to-morrow, but it is understood that the proceedings will be private, and not in any way political.

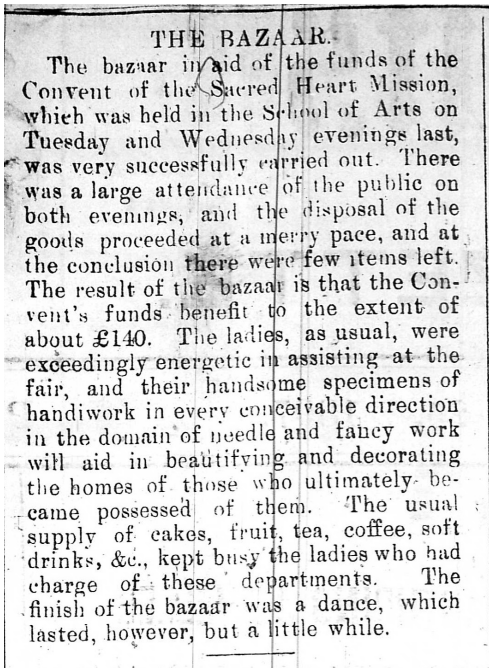
<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Rees, Coaralie and Leslie, *Coasts of Cape York*, Angus & Robertson, London, Sydney, 1960.p.80.

<sup>16</sup> *Timeless Isle* p.31.

<sup>17</sup> P.6.

<sup>18</sup> P.5.





Samuel Griffith! The accompanying facsimile is from *The Argus*, Thursday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1892.<sup>19</sup>

So it appears that by the early 1890s a Convent Christmas Bazaar has been well established. Whether the bazaar of 1891 was the first or whether there was one earlier is not known. It is just that no record has been found of an earlier one.

The facsimile from the *Torres Pilot*, headed "The Bazaar", is from December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1897, and confirms the tradition.

### Sisters' St. Andrew's hospital

The Sisters gain a mention in the Government Resident's *Report* of 1893 in the context of their having established a hospital. While this is not essentially a school matter it would have impacted on the children in so far as it was located nearby, behind the church and presbytery. The comings and goings of the nursing Sisters and their care of the hospitalized would have been a practical example of selfless kindness and care that the children would have unconsciously picked up.

The Government resident writes:

#### "ST. ANDREWS COTTAGE HOSPITAL

The French Catholic fraternity have built a very suitable cottage hospital on a healthy site immediately above their church and presbytery. The sisters from the convent have ministered to it by supplying the food and additional nursing when this has been necessary.

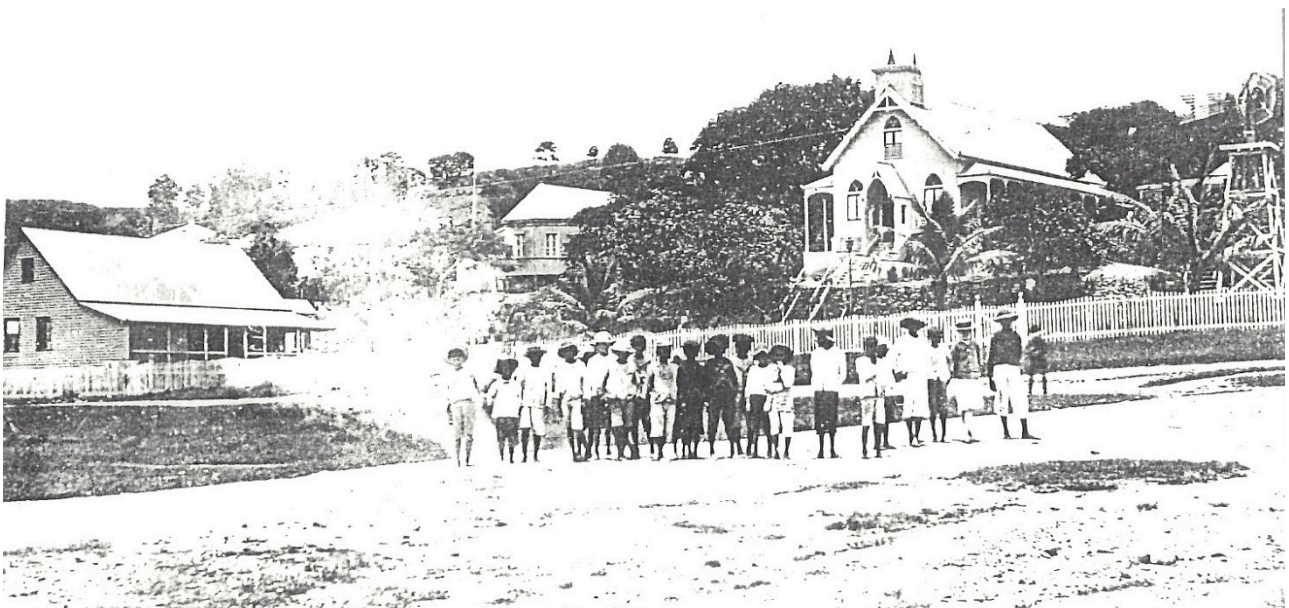
It is managed by a committee elected by the subscribers, and it is open to everyone, without distinction of creed or nationality.

The little cottage hospital has been open since 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1891, and sixty-five cases have been dealt with.

Up to the present time Dr. Salter's most valuable services to this institution have been gratuitous."


Dr. Salter's generosity, hopefully, may have been mentioned to the children, adding to their experience of kind and selfless people in their lives.

There are some undated photos from what appears to be this period.



<sup>19</sup> P.6.

It's not known whether the photo of boys in the street in front of the church and school is of students at the school or just children in the street. In this picture the building at the left is the School and is the clearest and earliest photo of the School. The date is unknown but appears to be about 1900. (The picture is from the Greenwood/Gillstrom Collection No.188, Torres Strait: Thursday Island 1901-4. But this collection of photographs has not yet, 2012, been located.)



The photo with children playing below the church shows the girls in long white dresses and it may be that some of the images are of boys in “sailor suits”. Whether the sailor suits were the uniform of the boys or just their choice of apparel is not known. The photo of the children playing is a very poor and it is hoped to gain a much clearer copy.

## Scholarship winner

[illegible]

The examination of Primary schoolchildren in Queensland in the 1890s was “Scholarship”. This entitled the recipient to some financial assistance in continuing on to secondary school. At this time there was a State Primary school on Thursday Island, begun in 1885, and it is believed that all T.I. primary students who submitted for the Scholarship exam as one group, probably all sitting for the exam at the State School. The records show that an **Alfred G. Smyth** from Thursday Island (third last line in the above chart) passed Scholarship. But at the time of writing (2011) it was not clear whether he was a student at the Convent or at the State school. The table of scholarships reproduced here in facsimile is from the Queensland State Archives.

## Sister Yvonne Leroux

As mentioned earlier Sister Margaret Sweeney nursed Sister Yvonne Leroux as she suffered, weakened and died from tuberculosis in 1893. Sister Yvonne is buried in the Thursday Island cemetery. While Sister Yvonne's death would have had an impact on the children of the school, it is usually easier to cope with the death of someone who is known to be sick and in danger of death. The Sisters in the Community, too, would have deeply felt the loss of one of their dear companions. It's not known if Sr. Yvonne taught the children or went about other duties on T.I.





## Death of the first school Sister, Sr. Margaret Sweeney, 1896



Sister Margaret, the reader will recall, was the very first English-speaking Sister to begin teaching the Catholic and other children on T.I. in 1887. She continued teaching till, in 1893, she contracted tuberculosis while caring for a Sister, Sr. Yvonne Leroux, who was dying from the disease and who eventually died and is buried in the T.I. cemetery.<sup>20</sup> To recover, Sr. Margaret travelled to Sydney for treatment. She prayed to her former mentor, Bishop Verius, who as Father Verius, M.S.C., was on T.I. when Margaret arrived and who had died and had had a reputation for great sanctity<sup>21</sup>. It's related that Bishop Verius had told Sr. Margaret that one day her great hope of going to New Guinea would be fulfilled. Margaret recovered from her illness and was appointed, not back to T.I., but to the village of Tsiria on Yule Island, New Guinea. The people loved her for her happy disposition and her care of the sick. In 1895 two Sisters there died of Blackwater Fever and Sister Margaret also contracted it. After a brief respite the illness returned and she

died on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1896.

The people of Tsiria begged that she be buried amongst them and this request was granted. "She has looked after us and loved us," they said, "We want her in our cemetery amongst us." She was only 30 years old.

The inscription on her gravestone on Yule Island reads:

Sr. MARGARET  
MARY SWEENEY  
FDNSC  
BORN 1866  
DIED 1896

## Retail competition and invention

### A MATCHBOX COMPETITION.

The prize money in connection with the collection of empty matchboxes of the "Helmet" brand No. 4 has been received by the local agents for the competition, Messrs. Brown, Campbell and Co. The competition is open for boys and girls under 16 years of age, and the prizes offered for the collection of the largest number of boxes amount to £10. The total amount to be distributed is £150, £10 of which goes to each town or district in the colony to which competition extends. It is understood that the competition locally will be a very keen one.

### THE CINEMATOGRAF.

Thursday Islanders will be afforded an opportunity of witnessing that wonderful scientific production, the Cinematograph, which Mr. Edison's genius has envolved during next week. It needs not much to said about it, a chance to see what it is will be far more instructive than a column of reading matter about it; and on Wednesday next it will be open to view at the School of Arts, charges of admission being reasonable, as will be seen in our business columns.

Two items mentioned in the *Torres Strait Pilot and New Guinea Gazette* in 1897 relate to the school in different ways. It's not known whether the Sisters drew the attention of the children to either of them. Most probably they did. One was the invitation to children under 16 years of age to enter a competition collecting matchboxes. At the time of

### THE CINEMATOGRAFHE.

The Cinematographe opened its show on Wednesday evening in the School of Arts. The wonderful ability of invention possessed by Edison is seen in the operation of this machine. The wondrous application of instantaneous photography, manipulated with such celerity as to completely portray detailed movements of all kinds,—people walking, horses running, trains hurrying along at sixty miles an hour,—everything occurring in street scenes, festive gatherings, &c., wondrously brought out, until the scenes impress one with a sense of reality while, however, they are but a continuous series of pictures. The Cinematographe is a machine the principle of which will be turned to other accounts and uses than for mere show purposes, but mechanical problems

<sup>20</sup> This information comes from a PowerPoint presentation the Sisters posted on the internet, and parts are a close paraphrase of the information found there.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed the cause of canonization of Bishop Henri Verius (often spelt Verjus) has been introduced. This means that he is being proposed to the Church for consideration to be declared a saint!

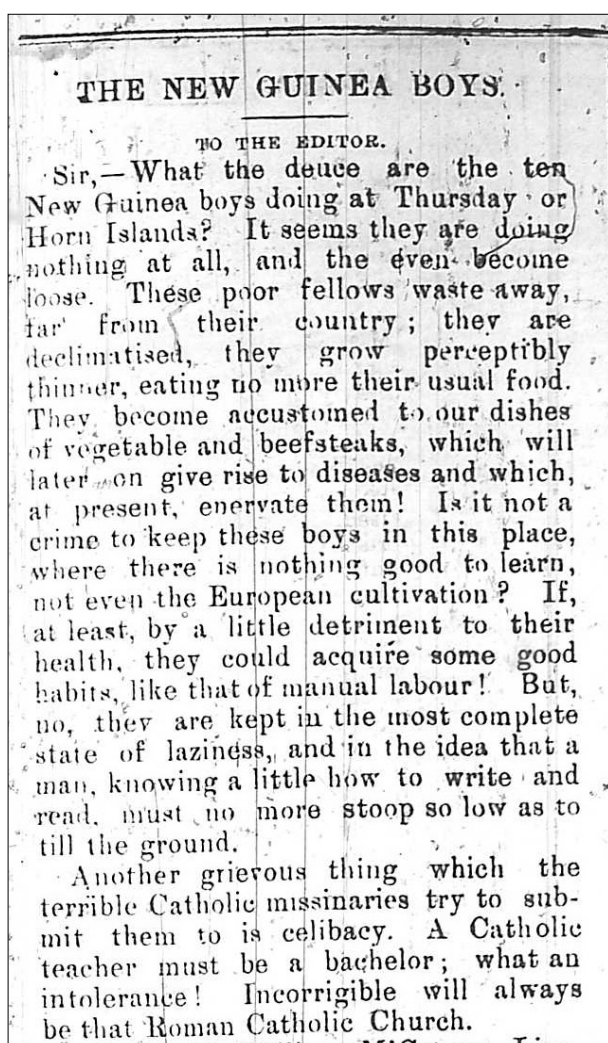


writing, 2011, the researcher is put in mind of campaigns by leading retail stores of the early twenty-first century, for example Coles and Woolworths, in organizing similar promotion arrangements whereby schools were to collect coupons to win prizes. *Plus ça change!*

In reflecting on the history of the School it is interesting to notice that it naturally follows the history of the development of technology from the end of the nineteenth century.

Thomas Edison and his many inventions form part of the basis of modern technology and here in 1897 is the coming to Thursday Island of the cinematograph.

The review of the presentation of the moving pictures is from the *Torres Strait Pilot* of Saturday, June 12, 1897.



Sacred Heart Mission. Mr. Corran's editorial commented on a long letter by "A MISSIONARY"<sup>22</sup> in the same paper. Sir William McGregor (1846-1919)<sup>23</sup> was at the time Lieutenant-Governor and Administrator of British New Guinea,<sup>24</sup> and went on later to be Governor of Lagos and then Governor of Queensland. His biographer tells of his support for the natives of New



### Criticism and reply

In this same issue of the *Pilot* is an editorial, headed "McGREGOR AND MISSIONS", almost certainly written by Alexander Corran, the owner and editor, on a controversy that had arisen from comments made by Sir William McGregor in his Annual Report for 1895-96 that included remarks on the

First, sincerely, are the New Guinea boys at Thursday Island looking more stupid than others? I don't think so, and upon the whole I believe them as sharp and intelligent, as if not more so, than many others who have always been in conditions more favourable for their intellectual development.

Second. Do you think, truly, they are declimatized because they have been transplanted here? The distance from their home is not very great! And next to the benefit of a more carefully attended education, would it not be worthy of a slight detriment for the health? But this detriment does not appear. Would Sir, William, perhaps, make up his mind to enclose all the Papuans under a glass case between a flag of any acid and a pinch of naphthalin, in order to keep them from all deleterious influence? It would be better to remove and place round New Guinea China's great wall, with the following inscription: Microbes not allowed to come in, nor kanakas to go out!

<sup>22</sup> Almost certainly this was Father Gilbert Buisson who served on T.I. from 1889 to 1903. (Pictured)

<sup>23</sup> Information taken from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, based on the Biography by R. B. Joyce.

<sup>24</sup> He succeeded John Douglas in that post.

Guinea and their development. It seems odd, therefore, that he made public criticism in his Report of the Sacred Heart Mission on Thursday Island. *The Pilot* editorial notes that Sir William, under a heading, “Missions”, “... touches on a report of the methods and working and the results accomplished by the different missions at work, and offers suggestions and criticisms with the object ostensibly of helping them, and of furthering the settlement of the country.” After treating of the Wesleyan Mission and the London Missionary Society work, “he deals thirdly with the Sacred Heart Mission and its work, although he endeavours to mitigate the severity of his remarks by a little plausibility, the effect of which, however, is lost.”

The criticism of the Report was printed in a mainland paper and drew a most lengthy, stinging and sarcastic (and at times, witty) reply from “A MISSIONARY”, believed to be French-born Father Gilbert Buisson, M.S.C. who was one of possibly two Thursday Island priests during 1897. There was no “turning the other cheek” by this missionary, possibly because it was the Sisters that he was defending, rather than himself.

At the time of writing, 2012, the actual Report has not been found, but its criticisms are clearly understood in the missionary’s reply since he lists nine criticisms in turn and refutes each. They relate to “ten New Guinea boys” who have been brought to Thursday Island and Horn Island. Criticisms include that the boys will waste away because of the strange “European” food; that they are lazy and indolent; that they do not learn, or are not proficient in English; that they are taught to remain celibate, and that the change in climate will affect their health.

The scathing attack on Sir William’s Report is reminiscent of the verbose English prose of the Victorian era that lent itself so well to such strong criticism. To give the reader just a taste, the accompanying facsimile passages may suffice; first the introduction to his long letter and then two points of rebuttal.

A tiny biographical note on Father Buisson remarks that “*he was a scholar and something of a recluse*”.<sup>25</sup> Sir William’s criticism of the Sisters’ attempts to be of benefit to the ten New Guinea boys obviously brought him out from his hermitage.

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<sup>25</sup> Littleton, James, M.S.C., *Sacred Heart Mission Torres Strait 1884-1967*, Fyshwick, ACT, 2009



# THE PILOT.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY.

SATURDAY, JUNE 26, 1897.

## QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE.

The efforts made on Thursday Island to celebrate in a fitting manner the occasion of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee have resulted in one great round of success, and the committee who have so thoroughly organised and carried into effect the round of event, from the Albatross picnic on Monday to the adult's ball on Thursday evening, must feel highly gratified. Limited space forbids us enlarging in any way on this topic; but the fact should be placed on record. The opening event of the celebrations was the

### PICNIC TO GOODE ISLAND

on the Albatross, which was organised by the Government Resident, the Hon. J. Douglas, and came off on Monday last, quite a number of ladies and gentlemen, some fifty or sixty—taking advantage of the limited space available on the Albatross. A good day was spent, and the sail down the harbour was splendid. On arrival at Goode Island a royal luncheon was partaken of, and "the Queen," and other toasts were drunk in bumpers of champagne, each being enthusiastically received and cheered by the company. Mr. Douglas in proposing the toast of "The Queen," made an impressive address, setting out some of the salient characteristic points of the long reign of Her Majesty, and the peculiar relationship of Torres Straits to it, the place being unknown when the Queen ascended the throne, but now an outpost of Australia civilization. The rest of the day was spent in an enjoyable manner, the party reaching home early in the afternoon.

themselves.

Though we will shortly find such antipathy amongst the white adults towards their children being taught with the other children that a separate school for "coloured" children was sought and granted.

Another interesting sidelight on the racial hierarchy of the time was the remark at the end of the account on the sports:

The prizes for the coloured men's events and the Japanese competitions will be paid over on the ground.

The settling for other events will take place at Burke's hotel on Monday, 28th instant, at 8 o'clock.

## Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrations on T.I., 1897

Queen Victoria may not have been widely celebrated in Catholic schools on the mainland, particularly those conducted by religious orders of Irish origin. On Thursday island, however, the Queen's jubilee in 1897 -- sixty years on the throne -- was thoroughly celebrated, including activities for the children. Undoubtedly the children from Sacred Heart School participated enthusiastically. They would definitely have received medallions celebrating the Jubilee as controversy about the presentation of these medallions raged for several months!



First of all the celebration. Reproduced at the left is the beginning of Mr Corran's "editorial" in *The Pilot*. And also reproduced is part of the account of the Children's Ball.

But most revealing of aspects of Thursday Island society is the account of the sports. There were separate events "For whites only", "For Japanese only" and "For coloured men only".

The children's events appeared to have had no "colour bar". This may be significant in so far as the younger generation was growing up familiar with children of other racial origins being equal to

### THE CHILDREN'S BALL.

With what bright and cheerful recollections of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee ball will the children of Thursday Island in time to come look back! Undoubtedly the prettiest and most effective display made during the week was that of the children assembled in the School of Wednesday evening. And what praise can be too great for those who so generously and unstintingly gave of their time, money and property that the little ones might enjoy themselves. To say anything in praise might be considered fulsome by some people, but where gratitude is not altogether wanting in the hearts of children for pleasure afforded, there will be some given by them to those who have worked to render their ball a time of elation at the present, and pleasurable recollections in the future. A neat little programme of twelve dances was gone through, a preliminary grand march bringing on the occasion, in which Dr. Salter—whose zeal met with a successful reward, doubtless, when he saw the sinuous lines of the procession marching in the hall—had the principal controlling hand. The ladies who had previously schooled the children in the dances, both set and round, must have been delighted when on this occasion the children carried themselves with that fascination of movement which belongs only to them. Among the fancy dresses worn by the children were:—Miss Mary Beach, "Gainsborough girl," white silk dress, rushes round neck with pink silk elbow sleeves of the same and large pink sash large Gainsborough hat with ostrich feathers; Miss Elma Beach "Cupid," blue satin dress edged round the neck and sleeves with white chiffon, the skirt of blue satin and red velvet, wreath of white roses round the head and body with Cupid bow and darts, and necklet of hearts; Hugh Beac, "Jack Tar," Jack Beach, "Captain Cook," black cloth trousers with gold braid and

(Facsimiles from the *Torres Strait Pilot* and *New Guinea Examiner*, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1897.)



## THE EVENTS.

Committee: Messrs. G. Smith, D. A. Menzies, Lieut. U. E. Parry-Okeden, D. Murphy, W. A. Burke, and A. G. Stuart.

Handicappers for Foot Races: Messrs. J. George, D. A. Menzies, and D. Murphy.

Handicappers and Lap Scorers for Bicycle Races: Messrs. Burke and Harrison.

Starter: A. G. Stuart.

Judge: Lieut. U. E. Parry-Okeden.

1. Maiden Race, 100 yards. First prize £1 5s., 2nd prize 10s., 3rd prize 5s. Entrance fee 2s. For whites only. Turner 1, M'Leod 2, Sullivan 3.
2. 50 yards Handicap, for girls 6 and under. First prize 5s., 2nd prize 3s., 3rd prize 2s. C. Murray 1, Clara 2, A. Rodeick 3.
3. Sheffield Handicap, 130 yards. First prize £4, 2nd prize £1 5s., 3rd prize 15s. Entrance fee 6s. For whites only. Sullivan 1, Turner 2, Stuart and Nicholas 3.
4. 50 yards Handicap, for boys 6 and under. First prize 5s., 2nd prize 3s., 3rd prize 2s. Morrisett 1, E. Gummow 2, Beach 3.
5. 130 yards Handicap. First prize £1, 2nd prize 10s., 3rd prize 5s. Entrance fee 1s. 6d. For coloured men only. Billy Prince of Wales 1, Tom 2, Norman 3.
6. 75 yards Handicap, for girls from 7 to 12 inclusive. First prize 5s., 2nd prize 3s., 3rd prize 2s. C. Thompson 1, C. Smith 2, K. Williams 3.
7. 75 yards Handicap, for boys from 7 to 12 inclusive. First prize 5s., 2nd prize 3s., 3rd prize 2s. Fleming 1, H. Nicholas 2, Sinclair 3.
8. Half-mile Bicycle Open Handicap. First prize £1 10s., 2nd prize 10s. Entrance fee 2s. E. M'Nulty 1, Roberts 2.
9. 100 yards Handicap, for boys from 12 to 16 inclusive. First prize 7s. 6d., 2nd prize 5s., 3rd prize 2s. 6d. C. Davis 1, E. M'Nulty 2, J. Davis 3.
10. Running High Jump. First prize £1, 2nd prize 10s. Entrance fee 1s. 6d. For whites only. Young 1, M'Leod 2, Daggan and Ockelford divide.
11. Throwing the Cricket Ball. First prize £1, 2nd prize 10s. Entrance fee 1s. 6d. For whites only. Burke 1, Callaghan 2.
12. 440 yards Handicap. First prize £1 10s., 2nd prize 15s. Entrance fee 2s. For whites only. Nicholas 1, Sullivan 2.
13. 100 yards Handicap, for girls from 12 to 16 inclusive. First prize 7s. 6d., 2nd prize 5s., 3rd prize 2s. 6d. A. Annie 1,

F. Quaife 2, L. Quaife 3.

14. Manx race, 50 yards, for boys 16 and under. First prize 10s. J. Davis 1, M. Smyth 2.
15. Alarm Race 100 yards. First prize £1 5s., 2nd prize 15s., 3rd prize 10s. Entrance fee 2s. 6d. For defence force and police only. Corporal O'Loughlin 1, G. Turner 2, G. Eggers 3.
16. High Jump, for boys 16 and under. First prize 5s., 2nd prize 2s. 6d. J. Davis 1, G. Smyth 2.
17. Torres Straits Coloured Natives' Handicap, 100 yards. First prize 10s., 2nd prize 7s. 6d., 3rd prize 2s. 6d. Dick Mobiaz 1, Tom 2, Norman 3.
18. Consolation Race, for boys, 100 yards. First prize 5s., 2nd prize 3s., 3rd prize 2s. Veto 1, H. Buck 2, Bourns.
19. Running Hop, Step and Jump. First prize £1, 2nd prize 10s. Entrance fee 1s. 6d. For whites only. Burke 1, Young 2.
20. Consolation Race, for girls, 100 yards. First prize 5s., 2nd prize 3s., 3rd prize 2s. N. Mills 1, K. Williams 2, L. Quaife 3.
21. Three Mile Bicycle Open Handicap. First prize £3, 2nd prize £1 5s., 3rd prize 15s. Entrance fee 5s. Murphy 1, Sullivan 2, E. M'Nulty.
22. Manx Race, 75 yards. First prize £1. Entrance fee 1s. For whites only. Carter 1, M'Leod 2.
23. Putting the Weight, 22lbs. First prize £1, 2nd prize 10s. Entrance fee 1s. 6d. For whites only. Burke 1, Turner 2.
24. Sack Race 75 yards. First prize £1, 2nd prize 10s. Entrance fee 1s. 6d. For whites only. Carter 1, Nicholas 2.
25. Tug-of-war 10 men aside. First prize £2 10s. Entrance fee 2s. 6d. a-side. For coloured men only. Divided.

## Presentation of the Jubilee Medals

But before leaving the Queen's Jubilee celebrations of 1887 let's look in on the presentation of the commemorative medallions to the schoolchildren, including the Convent children.

It started out straightforwardly enough. There was a Diamond Jubilee Committee which held a final preparatory committee meeting early in August, 1897, and, amongst other things:

*"The Meeting decided to present to the children attending the two schools one each of the oxydised medals which had been purchased, to the white children and a white metal medal each to the coloured children; those who had been non-resident on the island for a month previously to Jubilee Day being disqualified. The Committee had 200 medals altogether – 150 oxydised, 50 white metal – and after the children had been given one each, there would be about 50 left, which it was decided should be sold, the proceeds to be expended in preparing a statement of Jubilee accounts. In connection with the selling of the remaining medals, it was decided that priority to purchase one each should be given to members of the committee, and children who were disqualified should have the next claim."*



(The medals pictured here would be very similar to the ones presented to the children. Efforts are being made to find the exact image of the medals presented to Australian school children in 1897)



#### THE JUBILEE MEDALS.

When the question of the best way to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee was before the public of Thursday Island, and the proposal passed to obtain medals to be given to the children of the island, it will be distinctly remembered that the intention of the people themselves and of the General Committee was that the medals were to be distributed to all the children of the island as a memento of the greatest celebration in the world's records hitherto. The occasion of distribution was to be upon the day of the children's picnic, when they were to be handed to the children, irrespective of colour. In fact, there was equally as definite an understanding with regard to this matter as to any other item discussed and since carried out. Unfortunately the medals were not to hand at the time; they could not be obtained for distribution any earlier than for Saturday last; and in the meantime the intentions of the public and of the General Committee have been set aside, and instead of distributing them as originally intended, only school children who were present on a certain date have received them from the committee; the remaining medals, it having been decided, on the recommendation of the Medal Sub-committee, being offered for sale to anyone who would like to purchase one, with reservations in favour of certain children, disqualified according to the committee's stipulations, and of the members of committee. Need it be pointed out, then, wherein the first intentions of subscribers, who desired the medals to be given to the children of the island and who had not the remotest idea of starting a trade in them for the benefit of the Jubilee funds, have been thwarted? It is no wonder, indeed, that the parents who subscribed and looked forward to the medals, the only local memento of an occasion the like of which may never occur again, being given to the children are bitter in their complaints. Why the committee shut out of sight of the magnanimous view taken by the public, and let their characteristic commercial instincts step in to the deprivation of the young people of what is theirs, is a question that finds no justification in the shortage of funds; that goes almost without saying; and there is sufficient confidence in the probity of the General Committee to dispense with the proposed statement of accounts, the cost of which is to be paid out of the profits arising from the sale of the medals, which were purchased to be given to the children! The bitter feeling engendered by this matter is an illustration of what follows when, in public matters, those entrusted with carrying out the public will substitute, with good intention, no doubt, some fanciful scheme of their own.

Those following closely would have noticed that the white children were to be given a different, presumably a superior, medal, and the other children one of lesser quality! Quite presumably this was accepted by all, children and adults alike, without comment, and just accepted as the way things were.

But that was not the end of the matter. Readers may choose to skip the telling of this incident, but by reading on they may gain a further insight into Thursday Island society in the year of Our Lord, 1897.

A week later the accompanying facsimile appeared in *The Pilot*. The reader will notice that the medals were unavailable for presentation on the picnic day, which was the original scheme, and so were distributed on another day, and "only school children who were present on a certain date have received them from the committee."<sup>26</sup>

There followed an almighty kerfuffle as to which children amongst those who had missed out should get one. Even the definition of a "child" was canvassed in committee. The Committee members were castigated in *The Pilot* (clearly by Mr. Corran). You can see that there was a Public Meeting to discuss the final distribution of the medals to the children! Several passages cut from *The Pilot* of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1897, will give a flavour of the arguments.



But the letter to *The Pilot* of the same date suggests that there is developing through this controversy over the medals, a shift in the politics and society of Thursday Island. The letter-writer refers to an "abominable clique rule under which we have suffered more than long enough". The author suggests that the manly thing to do is to become emancipated from the "rule" of his clique.

We will later see reference to a group within Thursday Island society who considered themselves superior to others. We'll see further changes, as time goes by, that led to greater equality and a desire to hold the destiny of the Island and its inhabitants firmly in the hands of the ordinary citizens.

The photo of the children standing in front of the school appears to be about 1900. This was the main school building for about 60 years and is on the site of the 2011 Sacred Heart Mission Hall, facing Douglas St. The schoolrooms only shifted up the hill in 1962 when the disused Orphanage

was made available. It then became a "Hall".

<sup>26</sup> *Torres Strait Pilot*, August 14, 1887.







the 1898 is the first concert the school ever presented. Most probably there were annual concerts but they have not been recorded.

#### ENTERTAINMENT BY THE CONVENT SCHOOL PUPILS

The pupils of the Convent School gave a very successful entertainment in the School of Arts on Wednesday evening. The "house" that greeted the rising of the curtain was one of the greatest that has been seen on Thursday Island, and the financial result must have proved very satisfactory indeed. The platform had been neatly decorated, and set off the various "actions" by the children splendidly, the effect being very pretty. The children's clever singing together of "Advance Australia" was the opening item, followed by a toy symphony, which was conducted by Mr. Mollenhauer, but the effort to keep time was so great that in itself it was amusing. However, it was a novelty for Thursday Island, and the next effort of the kind will doubtless be an improvement. But the children's work on the programme was on the whole eminently pleasing, and in this result the patience needed to secure it must have found a sufficient reward. The programme was strengthened by the names of several adults, Mrs. Ball rendering a song cleverly and with much appreciation. Mr. Bromley sang "Will o' the Wisp." Miss Lamb showed very good talent in rendering her selection, and "Let me like a soldier fall" was stirringly sung by Mr. Hefferan. The drama, "The Reverse of the Medal" did not disclose a great amount of histrionic ability on the part of the performers, but every consideration must be shown, of course, for their acting, as they are not even amateurs.

The dance at the close of the entertainment was largely availed of, the floor at being uncomfortable crowded.

("On Boxing Night ..." *Torres Pilot*, Dec. 29, 1900.)

And so the nineteenth century drew to a close.

Throughout the 1890s the Australian newspapers, including Thursday Islands' own weekly, *Torres Strait Pilot*, were constantly reporting the Constitutional Conventions that were drafting the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia. It is not fanciful to believe that the school children would have been presented with maps of Australia showing the areas and names of the different "colonies" and their

## THE PILOT.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1899.

#### CONVENT SCHOOL CONCERT.

As usual in previous years, a splendid audience attended the entertainment by pupils of the Convent School on Boxing Night, when a long programme was submitted and patiently heard. The children acquitted themselves with credit, but the entertainment becomes very tedious when so many items are introduced into the programme, and if it had been fully carried out 12 o'clock would have been reached ere its conclusion. The dance at the conclusion was apparently a much more enjoyable affair, perhaps because it was altogether unseasonable, and really there must be an immense amount of enjoyment in bounding along to the rhythmical galop or schottische, &c., when the thermometer is registering about 98 deg. on the spot.

On Boxing Night, there was a concert given by the pupils of the Convent Schoolroom, and an enjoyable evening was spent. The chief features of the entertainment were the vocal items rendered by Mrs. Cleveland and the comic songs by Mr. A. G. Flay, who both delighted the audience. All the children acquitted themselves well, chiefly noticeable being the recitation, "I want to Fly," the comic duet, "How can they tell Oi am Oirish," and another recitation, "Old Times." The character dancing of Messrs. J. Flannery and A. Sullivan were also pleasing items. A long list of items was concluded after 11 o'clock.

The attendance was not nearly so large as on previous occasions, when the School of Arts has been requisitioned; and it would be much more suitable to our cosmopolitan community if entertainments of this kind were held there instead of in the convent buildings.

imminent union in the Commonwealth of Australia on the 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1901.

The beautiful portrait photo is of Mother Veronica D’Arcy who served at Thursday Island from 1899 to 1912. Whether Sister was part responsible for the “tedious” nature of part of the Christmas Concert of 1899 or deserved praise for the “much more enjoyable” dance that followed the concert is not recorded. But 13 years is a long time, and Mother Veronica should be commemorated for her contribution in laying a solid foundation for Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School.



### Some early students, 1889-1900

Thanks to the preservation of the handwritten entries of the names and details of the children admitted to the “St. Henry’s Azylum”, popularly called “The Orphanage”, we know the following names. This list does not include the day students who came from home each morning. This document is kept at the Cairns Diocesan Archives. There are details of parents’ names etc. but they have not been copied here.

Name	Born	Received	Dismissed
John Peope	Jervis Island	June 1889	December 1889
Therese Jose	Somerset	June 1889	Married March 1897
Ambrose Gregory Pavian	Sommerset		June 1889
Nicolosa Geronimo or Rinimo	Thursday Island	June 1889	Married 1900
Mary Elizabeth Ga	Thursday Island	July 1889	November 1892
Joseph Maggy	Maggy Island	July 1889	January 1898
Katie Stanley	Nibiate Island	July 1890	6 months
John Joseph Long	Herberton	September 1889	23 October
Mary Anna ?	Prince of Wales Island	September 1889	1890
Frank Whaoo	Friday Island	December 1889	March 1897
Josman	Singapore	November 1889	July 1890
Emily ?	Batavia River	July 1890	1891
Cecile Ehomb	Cooktown	January 1891	December 1898
Mary Elizabeth Ga	Thursday Island	September 1891	October
Spania Ga	Thursday Island	September 1892	1892
Mathew Ga	Thursday Island	September 1892	
Christina		September 1892	
Rosa		November 1892	Dead 9 November
Emilia but called Leonie	Mainland East Coast	January 1893	Married August 1900
Sarah Ann (Warren?)	Good Island	January 1893	28 November 1905
Susan Harriett (Warren?)	Thursday Island	January 1893	
Charlie	Yam Island	January 1893	December 1894
Susanah but called Anna	Thursday Island	January 1893	December 1897
Leonora			
Mary Hunter			July 1893
Zacharias			6 months
Marcellino			6 months
Jacob Remigio			6 months
Thomas Patrick Aitkinson	Cooktown		January 1894
Mag O’Rouck	Croydon		April 1894
Tom Loushung	Croydon	December 1894	January 1895
Mary	Horn Island	January 1895	Married January 1903
Leonora	Horn Island	January 1895	Married July 1903
Margaret Teresa	Horn Island	January 1895	Left 1900
Mary Luna	Horn Island	January 1895	10 April 1914
Mary Minnie Savage		April 1900	12 months gone to Wednesday Island
Raphaela Francis	Darnley Island	April 1900	For 6 months
Rose Bombay		September 1900	Married November 1903 in NG



Rose Bombay is given as the 40th child admitted up to the end of 1900. A glance of the list shows that there appears to be no intake of students from 1895 to 1900. Another thing to note is the greater number of girls than boys. Part explanation of this might be that boys over eleven or twelve years of age might have started work, or at least remained with parents to help with their work.

The payment by parents or guardians is interesting. The original document setting up the Orphanage in 1889 suggests that a payment of one pound (sterling) per child per month be made if at all possible. Some of the arrangements given in a column called "*Subvention they can afford*" include "*1 pound monthly*" (this is a common payment); "*Six pence @ day*"; "*2 pounds per month*"; "*Fifteen shillings per month*"; "*paid 2 pounds from June till Dec*"; "*one shilling a day*"; "*one pound, ten shillings a month*". Occasionally the column read, "*nil*".

It might be noted, too, that "Orphanage" is not an appropriate name for this institution. In later times it was referred to as "Hostel". There are quite a number of letters extant of parents giving the Sisters permission to care for their children for a particular period of time. This was most understandable for families who lived on islands other than Thursday Island and desired a Catholic education for their children. There was the belief, also, that by attending the Convent school, children would gain a good education and consequently an entry into emerging Australian society.

## Sister Marthe

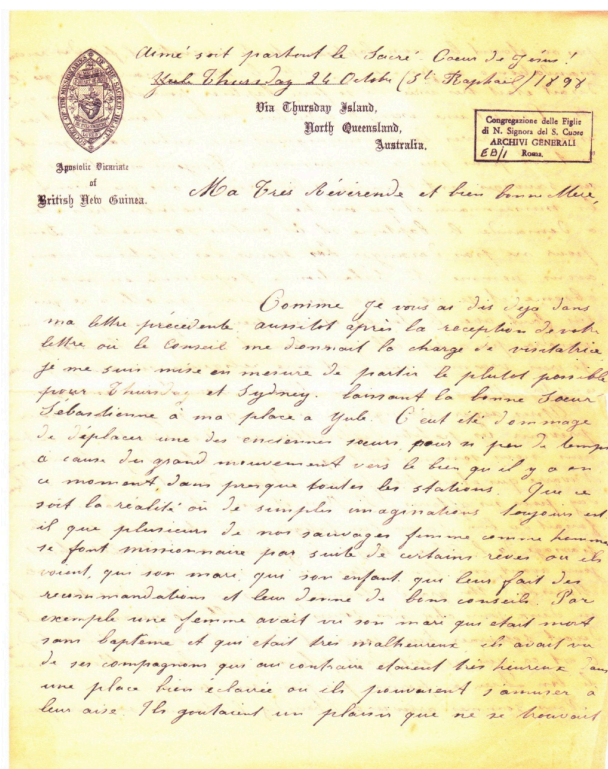
Sister Marthe Douillard (pictured) was part of the Sisters' Community on Thursday Island during 1886 and 1887 and records show she returned at other times. It's not known whether she taught the children or did other tasks in the Sisters' or the wider community. In the 1898 letter mentioned in the following, Sister Marthe is described as a most saintly person.



## Visitation of 1898

The Sisters were visited in 1898 by one of their Superiors and a picture of their situation sent back to the General House in France. The letter/report is addressed to

Mother Marie Louise, the superior of the Sisters, whose interesting life was very briefly described in Chapter 2. The author is Sister Ligouri, and is thought to be the same Sister Ligouri who came to T.I. with Sister Margaret Sweeney, the first Australian and English-speaking Sister to teach the children on T.I.



It's interesting to note that the letterhead has been borrowed from the "Apostolic Vicariate of British New Guinea" and the address is given as "Via Thursday Island, North Queensland, Australia." This is a reminder that the original idea of Thursday Island as a place for a community of Fathers, Brothers and Sisters was that it be a "launching base" for ministeries in New Guinea ... the preferred area of apostolate at that time.

Surprising to relate that a number of the Parish Priests of Thursday Island of this time became Bishops, and two of them, Bishop Henri Verjus (1885-1889 on T.I.) and Archbishop Alain de Boismenu (1898-1906 on T.I.) "... are currently [1984] being examined by the Sacred Congregation for the Saints in Rome, to see if claims of heroic sanctity can be upheld."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Annals Australia*, November/December, 1984.



## CHAPTER 6

## Thursday Island at the end of the nineteenth century

## An observer's portrait of Thursday Island, September, 1899

It may be beneficial to read the following picture painted of Thursday Island and its society by a journalist observer, reproduced from the *Sydney Evening News* of 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1899, and published in the *Torres Strait Pilot* on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1899: (The article is cut and pasted in a form easy to read.)

## AS OTHERS SEE US.

"WHITE AND BROWN."

"WHERE THEY MEET."

"MEN OF MANY COLOURS."

The quoted headings above are at the head of the first portion an article appearing in the Sydney "Evening News" supplement of 9th instant, and are introductory to a cleverly written and highly instructive description of a no-

table pressman's visit to our "Insular Babel," as he not inappropriately terms Thursday Island. There is a good line drawing of the island as seen from the harbour illustrating the article, which we hope shortly to be able to reproduce, and meantime we take the liberty of extracting the following interesting description of ourselves and the island as seen through an observant visitor's eyes.

After describing the voyage up in the Futami Maru, and the little ways that the Japanese has got, the article goes on:—

But enough of the floating Japanese and his ways for the present, and let us get ashore at Thursday Island, though the Japanese will be by no means lost sight of there, for it is at Thursday Island that the Japanese question comes in. Thursday Island is one of the Prince of Wales Group, which includes Prince of Wales Island, a considerable island of about twenty miles in each direction, Horn Island (of which more anon), Tuesday Island, Wednesday Island, Friday Island, and Jervis Island. The discoverer

who named the various portions of the archipelago to the north of Australia does not seem to have been a man of much originality in the way of nomenclature: but that cannot be helped now, and so Thursday Island must be left to acquire fame under the rather prosaic name which it has long borne.

The island, where one arrives after about ten days' very pleasant trip, is about one and three-quarter mile long, and three-quarters of a mile broad. This seems insignificant, but Thursday Island does not think itself insignificant, and it is not. It is a sort of Australian Gibraltar—a coaling station, with a permanent garrison of forty-five to fifty men, a fort with modern 6-inch artillery, and as many military roads as can be crammed into the space at command. Moreover, it is in its way a great centre of trade, and it is rent by internal politics. Thursday Island carries more politics in proportion to its acreage than any other part of the habitable globe, and politics of a very high class and great importance, too, but this is not just the moment to speak of them. It is more necessary to get ashore, whither passengers and their luggage are conveyed in whaleboats, pulled by strapping Cingalese, about five to a boat, who make their oars bend, and who, the shallows being reached, take passengers of whatever weight on their backs—ladies in their arms—and deposit them dry-shod on the shingle. These Cingalese, who form the whole port-boatmen class, and have to be of first-rate strength and condition to struggle with the tearing and uncertain tides of Torres Strait, wear trousers, singlets, and (when resting) pyjama jackets; but there are other Cingalese—men, be it understood—who wear a skimpy petticoat, reaching to the ankles, have their hair done up in chignons, which fashion is not universal among the boatmen, and from a distance much resemble dilapidated old black women. There is on the island in a popu-



lation of something near 2000, inclusive of Europeans, about half a dozen nationalities, Chinese, Japanese, Javanese, New Guinea men, South Sea Islanders, in-

—are all fat, and have the traditional appearance of the "bunniah" or native money lender, while the New Guinea boys lighten their hair by the use of lime, and thus might pass either for brown men with red hair, which by the aid of art they practically are, or red-headed men who had browned their faces.

#### A MIXED AUDIENCE

The passengers by the Futami had an opportunity of observing the wonderful variety of their fellow creatures—not at the opening of a church but at a theatrical performance—one of the most notable theatrical performances ever given on any stage. The Futami was joined at Townsville by a theatrical company, a company of the sort which might have been taken round by the late Mr. Vincent Crummles, and the night but one after the arrival these Thespians, who were awaiting the coasting steamer to Normanston en route for Croydon goldfield, opened at the local School of Arts, which is the size of a good big barn, in melodrama. The principal object of interest in the School of Arts is a sort of a monumental wooden slab which originally stood over the grave of two members of an exploring expedition who had perished of thirst. Some years ago it was partly destroyed by a mainland bush fire, and then was brought to Thursday Island, the Queensland Government intending to replace it by an indestructible cairn of stone. This memento mori stood in front, near the corner of the stage, in the place where if there had been an orchestra the big drum would have been, but it was not the least incongruity. The company was not striking, and in better surroundings might have been respectable; but the dressing and staging were such as might have been expected from those who had to face the perils of the road and sea and the vexations of small and precarious houses. Of the feature of the show, suffice it to say that the second villain, when protesting against the turpitude of his principal's instructions once accidentally placed his hand on top of a house depicted on a cloth which sometimes did duty as a London thoroughfare, sometimes as a fishing village; the walking gentlemen wore overcoats, presumably because of the somewhat rough and

ready character of their private wardrobes, in which, on a tropical night, and behind the glare of kerosene lamps with tin reflectors, they suffered severely; and the leading lady, the persecuted heroine, added to the mental torture which she must have undergone through the strangling of her father, the kidnapping of her son, and the sentencing of her husband to the gallows on a false charge of murder, by the physical affliction of a long drab ulster.

The villain alone is immaculate. He had a grey frock coat and trousers, and his boots were blacked—it is almost unnecessary to say that he was supposed to be a wicked baronet—and he wore a tall hat of surprising shininess. It is true that, possibly a concession to North Queensland prejudice, he carried a hunting crop instead of one of the more ordinary appurtenances of the London swell, but take him altogether, he might, if his get-up looked as well by the garish light of day as it did behind the footlights, have gone to a minor race meeting in a second-class carriage in the old country without appearing violently out of place. That tall hat redeemed much. All had

story that a Portsmouth music hall in St. Mary's street once displayed at its doors a haughty notice, "Ladies without shoes and stockings not admitted." But on Thursday Island the enthusiastic coloured playgoer of simple tastes finds no such limitation to interfere with his enjoyment of the drama. Ladies and gentlemen are admitted no matter what they please to put on or please to leave off. In fact, on the second night a colossal black gin called Mary, who was no more sumptuously attired or cleaner than are, as a rule, the inhabitants of La Prouse camp, saw fit to attend the performance of "The Guv'nor" with a picaninny of tender age. Her presence would have provoked no protest had not her offspring become impatient at the efforts of the dramatic muse, and begun to howl lustily, thereby provoking jocular cries of "Sit on it, Mary!" A Thursday Island audience is cordial and responsive—especially towards a comic singer, who was thrust into the midst of all sorts of dramas, entirely independent of whether they were tragic or otherwise. The cordiality of Thursday Islanders is to their credit, as they pursue art under the greatest difficulties. On the occasion upon which they were first observed in their capacity as playgoers the atmosphere of the School of Arts, although all the windows and doors were open, was as that of the Black Hole of Calcutta, yet many coloured gentlemen retained their seats all through, without budging, though those near windows sought relief by thrusting their heads and singlet-clad shoulders out during the waits and smoking vigorously.

Though the cutting and pasting could have been better effected, it is hoped the reader may have been able to gain some feel for the atmosphere of the Island and the nature of its people.

Note in passing that this is 1899 and still it is reported that to get ashore one must be carried bodily to dry land, “*passengers of whatever weight on their backs – ladies in their arms – and deposit them dry shod on the shingle.*”<sup>1</sup>

Another source of information and observation comes from a rather eccentric source, and that is a book entitled *Parts of the Pacific by a Peripatetic Parson*.<sup>2</sup> The book itself does not name the parson but catalogues give his name as Rev. J. Elkyn. It was published in 1896. Though an Anglican Parson he is very critical of his own church and speaks highly of the Catholic Church and its work on T.I.

*“On a prominent eminence stands the Roman Catholic Church, with its sisterhood and schools. Roman Catholics are the only Christians in Queensland who attach importance to religious education and sisterhoods. That, no doubt, accounts for Queensland being practically a Roman Catholic Country, in spite of the fact that they do not number more than one fourth of the population. Since my visit an Anglican Church has been built.”*

This eccentric gentleman tells of being entertained by the Government Resident at his home on the point and visiting and being entertained by various families during his sojourn. The impression gained is that social customs in those places was very much that of upper-class English society.

He comments, too, as do others, on the multi-racial nature of the population. He expresses it this way:

*“The population of the town is made up of Hindoos, Cingalese, Malays, Siamese, Javanese, Japanese, Poles, Irish, Scotch, and a few English and Germans. In fact, thirty-two different nationalities are represented there: and we see a good deal of the New Guinea people.”*<sup>3</sup>

At one stage the Government Resident in a Report mentions the prevalence of goats. The fence and windmill in the photo suggests it is in front of the school, convent and church. Over the years further comments on the prevalence of goats on the island can be found. The problem of goats is repeated in the *Torres Straits Pilot* of March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1897.



Goats are also mentioned by a visitor<sup>4</sup> of 1902. He remarks on the difficulty of keeping cows on the Island for their milk due to the long period of scanty rain and therefore pasture. Goats, however, he mentions as the main source of milk:

*“So scanty is the pasture then [during the dry] that the harmless necessary cow cannot be kept without artificial feeding. Indeed there are but two or three on the island. Goats, however, which are reported to be able to browse and fatten on old tins and broken bottles (these naturally abound) are in full force, and from those much of the milk supply is drawn.”*

John Douglas, the long-time Government Resident of Thursday Island, was asked to write a history, in 1899, for publication in 1900. The request came from the Federation League, an organisation devoted to the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia by the federation of the several colonies. He makes reference to “the great topic of the day”, namely the Referendum of 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1899.

<sup>1</sup> All of this from *The Torres Strait Pilot* of September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1899.

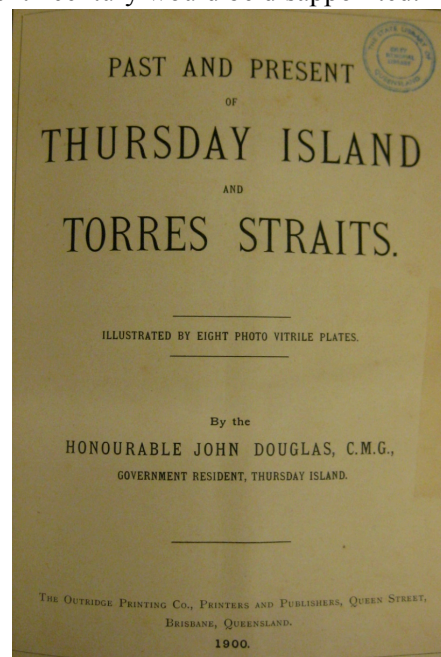
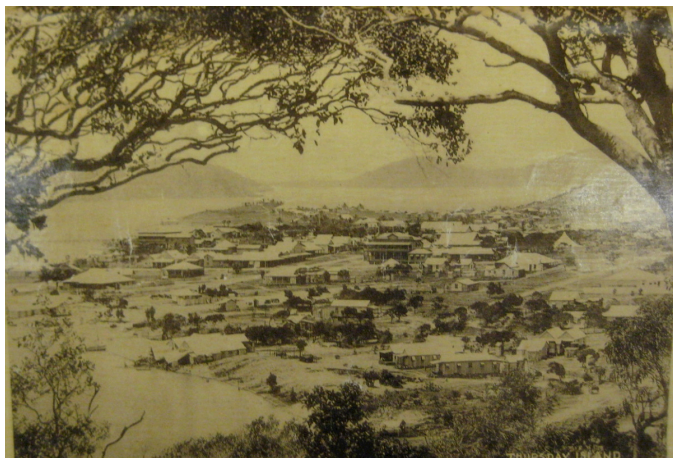
<sup>2</sup> Peripatetic Parson, (Rev. J. Elkyn) *Parts of the Pacific by a Peripatetic Parson*, Swan Sonnenschein & Co., London, 1896, p.96.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. T.J. Henry, “A Trip to the Tropics” in *Torres Pilot* of July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1903.



A staunch supporter of the federation of the Australian colonies, his address has that emphasis. While the “past” of the title of his address is well covered, the “present” is less well presented. The reader who might scan his pages for a portrait of Thursday Island at the end of the nineteenth century would be disappointed.



However, the following extracts will reveal some of the attitudes held by some on Thursday Island at the end of the nineteenth century. And considering that Mr. John Douglas might in some ways be considered to be “Mr. Thursday Island” from the mid 1870s to 1903, this is all the more remarkable.

The reader must keep in mind, however, that we should not judge attitudes then by our values of today, but merely to note them and realise that such attitudes formed the background to the history of the island at that time, including that of the school and the children.

Here are some samples:

*“They [the years 1877 to 1899] have been years of very great interest to me, and not altogether unprofitable, I hope, to the inhabitants of this little dependency of a dependency. We have grown slowly and surely. We are now known all over the world as the northern sentinel island of Australia, and the centre of a thriving local industry. You can hardly expect me, I think, to dwell on the present occasion on the history of the years from 1877 to the present time. ... Let us hasten on to the culminating point of our modern history now before us, that question that has to be decided next week on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1899.”*

He tells of giving a speech in London “about fifteen years ago” on the prospect of the various colonies combining in one federation. He made reference to Australia’s up-coming relations with the United States:

*“Nevertheless I went on and said that union amongst ourselves in Australia meant closer alliance with the United States and the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race!”...*

*“And now let me address to you a few earnest words of friendly counsel. I am not altogether in love with the Commonwealth Constitution ...”* [He tells of his misgivings.]

*“May we not hope [with the imminent formation of the united nation of Australia], may we not anticipate, that this Constitutional Commonwealth of Australia will be ‘raised in glory’, will be built up so as to illustrate in all its wisdom, its strength, and its beauty, the splendour and the beneficence of our Victorian era? When it is accomplished, as accomplished it certainly will be, it will be more for us and more for the human family, we will hope and believe than any of the great battles which have been lost and won during the last century. It will be more for us, and those who come after us, than all the military achievements of our times; more for us than the bloody holocaust of the Soudan; more for us than the commercial annexation of China or the territorial acquisition of Imperial India; more for us now and for ever afterwards than the crowning victories of Trafalgar and Waterloo, though it is possible that without them our Constitutional Commonwealth might have been relegated to an indefinite future. I say then that the adoption of the Constitutional*



*Commonwealth will be for us by far the greatest achievement which has yet been accomplished in our Australian history, and will be for us and for our children a glorious consummation in the closing years of the Victorian era."*

*"We stand up as Australians. We do not by any means cease to be Queenslanders or even Thursday Islanders. Nay, more – the very intensity of your local predispositions will be the measure of your usefulness in the larger life which awaits you. May I venture to say on your behalf, that while you joyfully claim to call yourselves Australians, and while you wish to identify yourselves with everything that is great and good in your inheritance, you are Home Rulers to the backbone. And what is Home Rule?..."*

*"No grander or more beneficent Empire [the British Empire] has flourished in the history of mankind."*

*"There are many of us in this little place [Thursday Island], but I believe we are good grit, and I expect that we shall vote as one man [in the Referendum approving of the Constitution]. Let us all be on the side of the angels ..."*

And while Mr. Douglas would have observed the way the citizens of T.I. participated in the Referendum, he would be consoled to read in *The Queenslander* of 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1899<sup>5</sup>: *"Thursday Island: Referendum Day here was marked by a certain amount of enthusiasm, and nearly all the electors on the island have recorded their votes."*

### Maggie McNulty recalls<sup>6</sup>

*"T.I. up till the Second World War was a prosperous place. There were many more white people than now . ... The whites and coloured people didn't mix, the way they do now [book published 1960]. The white people used to have race-meetings, balls and sailing regattas, and the Malays and Filipinos had their own dances. Life was more select. ..."*



### Population

The population of T.I., taken from the Government Reports, is as follows. Published in the year quoted they are the figures for the previous year:

1896: 1,354

1898: 1,702

1899: 1,515      Children: 318 (205 Europeans)

1901: 1,695      Children: 417 (249 Europeans)

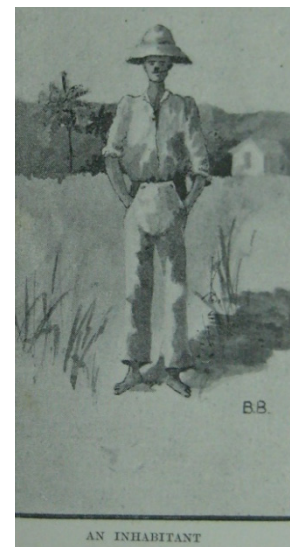
1902: 1,437      Children: 371 (241 Europeans)

It should be noted that not all "children" would have attended school. It was common for children to leave school at age 12 or 13. And, quite possibly, on the Thursday Island of the time, not to attend school at all.

(The sketches are from 1894, Boothby, *On the Wallaby*)

The Report for 1892 and 1893 gives some interesting comments:

*"The Philippine Islanders have increased from 61 to 98, of whom 30 are children. These people have become thoroughly domesticated among us. Some of them have married and have become naturalized, so that they promise to become part of the permanent population of the island. The Malays also have increased from 90 to 135, and of these 19 are children. The Chinese, gravitating from the south, have increased from 52 to 101. They are chiefly shopkeepers and traders, a few being gardeners."*



<sup>5</sup> p.540.

<sup>6</sup> Rees, *Coasts of Cape York*, p.78.



Many commentators and reporters mention the great variety of nationalities found on Thursday Island at this time. The Government Resident puts it this way in his report of 1893:

*"...Thursday Island seems to have an attraction for all sailors with a dark skin – negros from Africa, negros from the States, negros from the West Indies and the Brazils, South Sea Islanders, Arabs, Marutius men, Madrassees, Bengalis, Siamese, Javanese. All these may be found among our motley crews, the greater number, however, being either Malays, Manilla men or Japanese."*

## Predominance of Japanese

There was constant mention of the preponderance of Japanese on T.I. and how they tended to dominate the pearl-shell industry. The accompanying photo of the "Japanese Club" from 1895<sup>7</sup> will give some idea of their prominent place in T.I. society at the time.

And an article published in the *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton) in 1897<sup>8</sup> paints a vivid picture of the overwhelming presence of the Japanese throughout Thursday Island at that time, and how it was during 1897 or thereabouts that their numbers dramatically swelled. Mr. A. Dawson, M.L.A, a visiting Member of Parliament, told the newspaper:



the "Commemoration of Peace" by the Japanese of Thursday Island.

*"About twelve or eighteen months ago they [the Japanese] numbered about 300. To-day there are about 900, and still coming by every boat. ... On the shore they are gradually monopolizing the business of the whites; the only opportunity for white girls to get work at Thursday island is as barmaids. ... They have squeezed out every white carpenter, nearly every white diver, every small shopkeeper, every laundress; they run every billiard saloon, and are demons for the*

*game, and right along the line they are getting the ascendancy."*

The newspapers of the time through editorials and letters reflect a variety of opposing views about this dominance of the Japanese in almost all industries on Thursday Island. When the proposal of the "White Australia Policy" was being debated throughout Australia there was no lack of views canvassed on Thursday Island.<sup>9</sup>

## Coming of the gramophone

An announcement in the *The Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette* of July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1898 mentions the arrival of a gramophone and that "a free entertainment tonight at Bain's newsagency tonight at 8.00 o'clock. All invited" and announces that by July 9<sup>th</sup> there are two phonographs on the island.



## Politics of Islander development

In 1897 an Act was passed by the Queensland Government that would influence the way Islanders were treated for the following half century or so. It was the *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*. It appears that it was honestly designed to "protect" the aboriginal people of Queensland from "the debilitating influence of introduced vices."<sup>10</sup> It was believed that a great deal of control had to be exercised over the aborigines for their own good. However,

*"... both Douglas and Milman [Government Resident and Acting Government Residents at the time], the officials on the spot, did all in their power to see that the provisions of the 1897 Act were not extended to Torres Strait. In 1900 Douglas wrote:*

*The native-born population are British subjects. They marry and are given in marriage. They are human beings; they are our own flesh and blood; they are born under our jurisdiction; and they are entitled to the privileges we enjoy. The natives of the islands of the Torres Strait are capable of exercising all the rights of British citizens, and they ought to be regarded as such."*

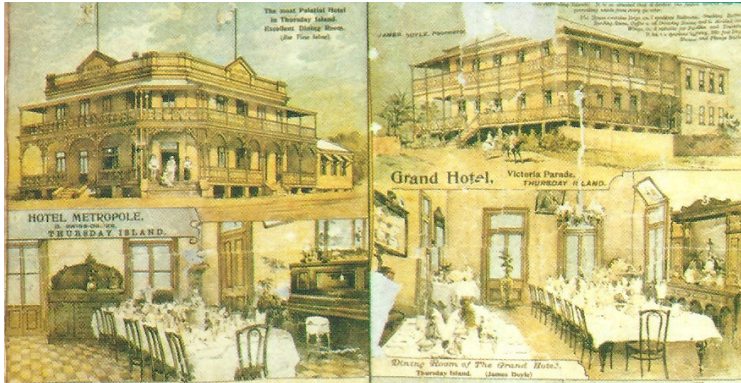
<sup>7</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1895, p.33.

<sup>8</sup> July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1897, p.6.

<sup>9</sup> An excellent reference on the domination of the Japanese on Thursday Island from approx 1897 to 1910, and the various points of view expressed, is found in Reynolds, Henry, *North of Capricorn*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, N.S.W., 2003, Chapter 5, "Thursday Island – A Multi-racial Gibraltar."

<sup>10</sup> Mullins, Steve, *A History of Colonial Occupation and Culture Contact, 1864-1897*, Central Qld. Uni. Press, 1994, p. 176.

*‘Nevertheless, after the turn of the century, officials with long experience in the region were replaced by professional bureaucrats who brought to the Straits ideas about ‘native policy’ formed on the pastoral frontier. They put their faith in a meagre paradox. For them there was no hope of the Islanders becoming independent until their lives were more strictly regulated, and for the next half-century Queensland’s oppressive protectionist regime denied Torres Strait Islanders, who were Christian and law-abiding Queenslanders, the most basic human rights. With this one era ended and another began.’*



## Grandeur

An excellent idea of the prosperity and grandeur of Thursday Island at the end of the nineteenth century is gained by glancing over the reprinted coloured poster. The original is held in the Queensland State Library and what is shown here is only part of an enormous poster/calendar for 1897.

## Islanders excluded from T.I.

More than once is reference to Torres Strait Islanders being forbidden to stay overnight on Thursday Island. One quote is from John Singe:<sup>11</sup>

*“In line with protectionist policies a system evolved whereby unauthorized whites were gradually excluded from the islands and Torres Strait Islanders excluded from Thursday Island. Boats working the eastern islands unloaded at Thursday Island but their Island crews were not permitted on the island during the hours of darkness.”*

Singe goes on to say that this may have been for their benefit, and he quotes descriptions of drunken behaviour on T.I. by its local residents. The attitude of the time was that Islanders had to be “protected” from such temptations.<sup>12</sup>

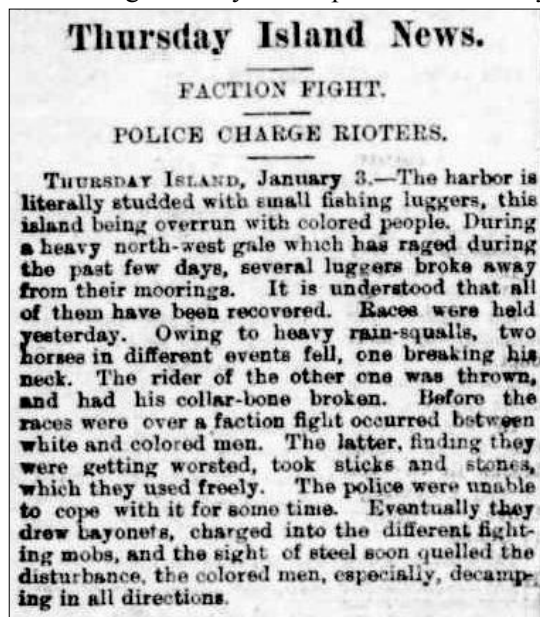
## White Australia

Much talk in the new Federal Parliament concerned the establishment of the “White Australia” policy, which would exclude from Australia any who were not racially “white”. The discussion on T.I. appears to be not so much about preserving the “racial purity” of Australia as to the continuing viability of the pearlshell industry. The idea of “White Australia” was opposed by the whites on the island because it was feared that if native divers were excluded from the industry, it would collapse. The opposition to “White Australia” appears to have been entirely pragmatic.

## Easy money and drinking

Visiting in about 1896 Hume Nisbet<sup>13</sup> noticed the Islanders’ casual treatment of their substantial earnings:

*“The [the Kanakas] are very lavish and extravagant with their money; indeed, all the time I was on Thursday Island I felt like a very poor white man. They go about carrying great rolls of banknotes in their outside coat pockets, and when they enter a bar, order their gin by the case, pitching down their bank-notes carelessly on the counter for the landlord to pay himself out of them, and hardly ever looking at the change as they shovel it up and stuff it into their pockets again, drinking from the tumbler and by the tumblerful without diluting the gin with water.”*



<sup>11</sup> *The Torres Strait*, 1979, p.100

<sup>12</sup> For more on protectionism see Sharp, *Footprints Along the Cape York Sandbeaches*, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Nisbet, Hume, *A colonial tramp: travels and adventures in Australia and New Guinea*, London, George Bell and Sons, 1896 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p.336.



And the next sentence begins: *"They are mostly all Roman Catholics ..."*

## Periods of lawlessness

Writing of the 1890s, Captain Foley has this to say:

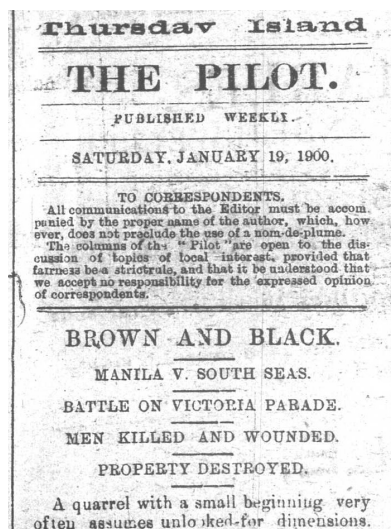
*"At Christmastime pearling stopped and floating stations headed for T.I. to undergo a six-week refit. Hotels did a roaring trade. Divers with a year's earnings in their pockets whooped it up after months of hard work in tough conditions. During these annual refits T.I. was a lively, and perhaps fairly lawless, town."*<sup>14</sup>

The newspaper extract, dated January 3<sup>rd</sup>, is from 1893 and gives an example "lively, and perhaps fairly lawless" activity.

Apparently T.I. had gained a reputation for such rowdy and lawless behaviour. In 1903<sup>15</sup> *The Torres Straits Pilot* (probably Mr. Alexander Corran) regrets that,

*"Thursday Island has so often been misrepresented, as being a most vicious and undesirable place where hordes of objectionable, even bloodthirsty, coloured aliens were supreme; and a perennial thirst satisfied with nothing less ardent, ruled the residents day and night, year in, year out; and a climate bordering, to judge by its excessive heat, upon the verge of Hades, ..."*

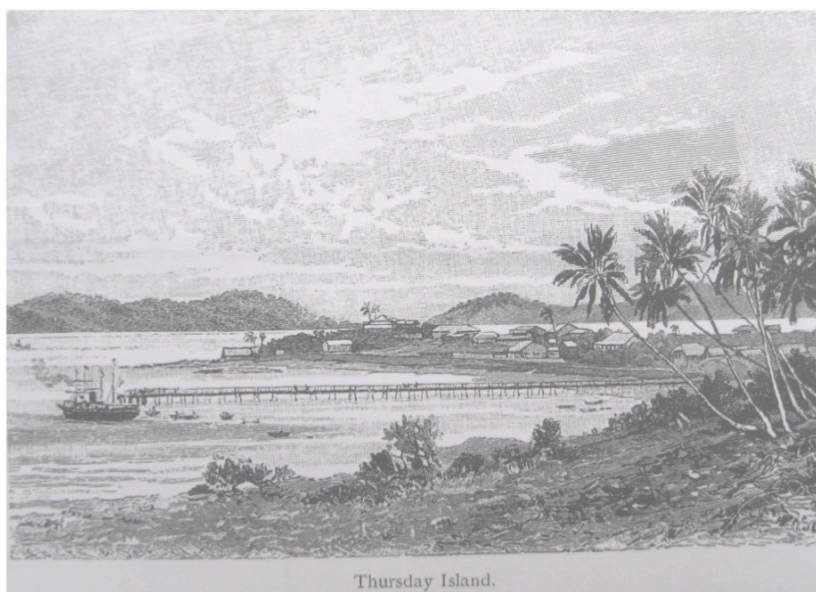
He then goes on to say how refreshing to find someone writing in a southern paper in a balanced way about T.I. He proceeds to quote from this visitor's reflections, though it is mainly descriptive of the island and the weather, rather than the people, their manners and customs.



This correspondent does, however, have a few things to say that may help to paint a portrait of T.I. just after the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>16</sup>.

But the fracas signalled in the headlines reproduced from the *Torres Straits Pilot* of January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1901, would indicate an occasional underlying tendency to violence. From a twenty-first century point of view there are some very curious aspects of this brawl between Islanders, or "South Sea Boys" and the Manilamen. Because of a vicious attack on a South Seas boy, revenge was being sought. The Islanders wanted to advertise in the *Pilot* that a fight was to take place. They even petitioned Mr. Douglas, the Government Resident, for permission to stage a fight and when refused they telegraphed Brisbane seeking permission.

Special constables were sworn in and the military was asked to be on the ready. About 100 Kanakas gathered at the corner of Victoria Parade and Normandy Street, (the street that runs beside the church block), up against about half that number of Manilamen. There was some "palava" and the Kanakas suggested there be fights one-on-one. This was interrupted by a club-wielding youth getting the fight underway. The whole melee was very close to the school and orphanage. A number of arrests were made and calm enforced, *"notwithstanding the*



<sup>14</sup> *Timeless Isle*, p.51.

<sup>15</sup> July 11<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> <sup>16</sup> Dr. T.J. Henry, "A Trip to the Tropics" in *Torres Pilot* of July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1903.

*rumours that are flying about alliances between classes to wipe out the Manilamen."*

And all this just days after the Island's happy celebrations of the beginning of the Commonwealth of Australia!

These periods of lawlessness obviously came and went as evidenced by another observer, Guy Boothby, writing (or printed) in 1894<sup>17</sup>:

*"Though a good many pearling luggers were still in the harbour when we arrived, the majority of the fleet had put back to sea, after the New Year's festivities, during which time the island had been a place of considerable mirth. Not unfrequently these little jollifications terminate uproariously, sometimes even with blood-letting, though any serious trouble has not occurred within the past five years."*

Boothby declares the characters he observed on Thursday Island<sup>18</sup> at this point of its history to be straight out of books of adventure fiction:

*"I think were I asked to name one place in this world where fascinating people may be met with, I should declare for Thursday Island. Strange folk, whose proper homes should be between the card-board covers of story books, are to be seen at every turn, playing billiards in the saloons, drinking in the grog shanties, or busily engaged on beautiful and mysterious vessels at anchor in the harbour: men with stories so fascinating, that we cannot doubt their probability; 'varsity' and public school men, dead to the world; vagabond heirs to great names; romantic nobodies, and the riff-raff of all humanity, working, gambling, feasting or starving, as the case may be."*

Occasionally visitors saw Thursday Island from a distance as beautiful and inviting only to be disappointed with closer acquaintance. One such was German naturalist, Richard Semon, visiting in 1892. He begins by remarking: *"I was at first quite charmed with its scenery and surroundings."* And after a lyrical description<sup>19</sup>, concluding with, *" – all this makes up a picture full of colour, life and variety,"* he goes on to say, *"Soon, however, I grew to dislike the place more and more."*<sup>20</sup>

(The illustration accompanies Semon's diary entry of 1892)

Keeping in mind the Sisters' all-enveloping religious costume, Semon's remark on the heat of T.I. might give the reader pause for reflection. He wrote: *"... the atmosphere is most sultry"* and, *"The smallest exertion bathes one in perspiration, and on some days it is oppressive beyond endurance."*<sup>21</sup>

He concludes with a most uncomplimentary dismissal: *"Those were unpleasant times in the little uninteresting settlement and its noisy Grand Hotel."*

### Shady side of life and a remarkable Anglican missionary

While the Sisters had their hands completely full with the children of the school and contact with their parents, a slight figure was quietly moving amongst the older natives, Japanese and the women of the "Boarding" houses of T.I. Florence Buchanan came to T.I. as an Anglican Deaconess in 1895 and adopted the Kanaka pearlers as her "Dear Boys" and the prostitutes of the "Boarding" houses as her "dear little things", and later she approached the Japanese with the message of the Gospel.



It's wonderful to know that such a dedicated and self-sacrificing woman was working for God amongst the older folk of T.I. while the Sisters worked amongst the children. A short biography of this most remarkable woman, written by Edith Jones, adds to our understanding of the Thursday Island of the turn of the century.<sup>22</sup> While it repeats some of the observations of others, the following description is related to spreading the Gospel and encouraging right living – what the Sisters had dedicated their lives to amongst the children.

<sup>17</sup> Boothby, Guy, *On The Wallaby or Through the East and Across Australia*, London, Longman, Green & Co., 1894, p.113.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>19</sup> Semon, Richard, *In the Australian Bush and on the coast of the Coral Sea*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1899, pp275-6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.276.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>22</sup> Jones, E., *Florence Buchanan*, London, Central Board of Missions, 1921. One copy is available in the Public Library of NSW with the call number of A922.3/B.



*“During the three months of the N.W. monsoon the sea is too “dirty” for diving, and the Japanese quarter [of T.I.], then accounting for half of the population [in roughly 1900] of the island, becomes a hive of drones; drinking, gambling, and debauchery are rife; and quarrels over girls in the “Boarding” houses sometimes end up in a sordid scene of murder. Could the Gospel light be brought to shine upon these lives? That was the problem Miss Buchanan set herself to solve, but the answer was not easy to find. White women never ventured into the Japanese quarter, and although the Japanese men overflowed into the township the girl-slaves of the “Boarding” houses were kept close.”<sup>23</sup>*

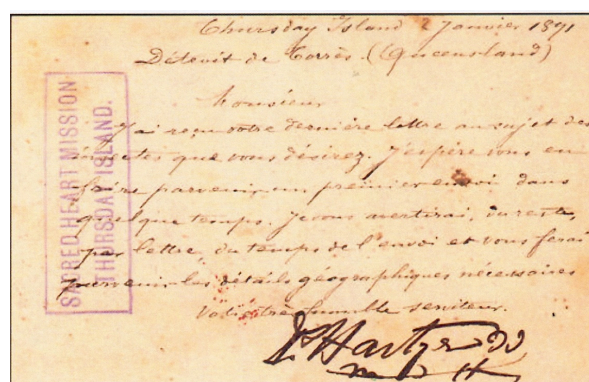
Without knowledge of the Japanese language Florence nevertheless moved amongst the Japanese pearlers with her message of Jesus as saviour and the principles of right living, with limited success. But having made some progress with turning at least one girl away from her life of prostitution, Florence was then refused contact with the “girls”.

*“The girl ... afterwards witnessed for Christ, and declared her wish to leave the boarding house; this she was enabled to do by marriage with one of the Christian men of the Japanese school [classes Florence conducted for the Japanese]. But this event resulted in the closing of the door against the Deaconess and her Bible; the crafty old women who kept the boarding houses were content while they thought the girls were being kept amused, but they foresaw that all their trade would be gone should the others learn to practice the precept: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’”<sup>24</sup>*

No record has been found at the time of writing, 2011, as to whether the Sisters and Florence Buchanan ever met, but meeting, had it occurred, could have been the source of much mutual prayer and encouragement.

## Postage

While it may seem inconsequential, the following facsimile of a postcard sent by Father Fernand Hartzer, M.S.C. (1884-1885, then again 1889-1894) is being displayed to provide a tiny insight into postage from Thursday Island towards the end of the nineteenth century. It was found by chance on the net posted by someone interested in stamps etc. By looking carefully the reader will see the Thursday Island postmark and also notice that a rubber stamp had been made for the Mission.



The date is “2 Janvier, 1891, sent from Detevit de Torres (Queensland)”. It is addressed to Albi, a city in the South of France, and bears the postmark from the Post Office there. And Father Ferdinand Hartzer was the son of Mother Marie Louise Hartzer, the Sister Superior of the Sisters in France to whom the Sisters on T.I. would occasionally send reports of their ministry.

## Quetta Church School, 1898 ... 1901

Little is known by the researcher at the time of writing about the Quetta Church School. A reference to it is found in the *Torres Pilot and New Guinea Gazette* of June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1898, where exam results are given. Then in 1901 we read: “The church school for Girls and Younger Boys commences its second term on Wednesday next ...”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Jones, E., P.29

<sup>24</sup> Jones, E., Pp.33-34.

<sup>25</sup> *Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette*, April, 1901. It’s not known at the time of writing as to how long this school continued and whether the Sisters shared resources etc with the teachers there etc.

## Description and atmosphere, 1902

### "A TRIP TO THE TROPICS"

Following is the continuation of Dr. Henry's account of Thursday Island:—

Owing to the fact that the wet season lasts from three to four months each year, and that during the remaining period there is not only very little rain but that a strong south-east trade wind blows without pause or peace, the island, whilst beautifully green for part of the year, is for the greater part exposed to drought. They know there, however, that, with end of the year, the drought will cease. In the dry time everything becomes brown and bare, and the grass almost disappears. So scanty is the pasture then that the harmless necessary cow cannot be kept without artificial feeding. Indeed, there are but two or three on the island. Goats, however, which are reported as able to browse and fatten on old tins and broken bottles (these naturally abound) are in full force, and from those much of the milk supply is drawn. There is little cultivation. A few Chinamen have small vegetable gardens; that is all. No crops whatever are put in. The islanders are dependent almost entirely on imported food and tinned comestibles.

The tides already alluded to are abnormal in this region. No man can calculate with accuracy how they will run. In the dry season they flow and ebb at the same hours daily for months together. But in the wet season they are erratic. No physiographer has been able—and experts sent by Government have studied and tried in vain—to draw up a table of tides. The tide, moreover, runs with great velocity, often attaining seven or eight knots an hour. The numerous islands round which it scours no doubt accounts for the complicated currents which characterise it.

The chief jetty is T shaped, and extends about 200 yards from the shore. It had to be built especially strong to resist the impact of the tides. It cost close upon £42,000.

close upon £42,000.

The climate is very equable. There is an absence of those sudden alternations of temperature which are noticeable in N.S.W. The summer temperature by day, in the shade, is usually between 90 and 95. It very rarely reaches 100. Thus Grafton can give it many points and beat it easily, despite its much closer proximity to the equator. At night it falls to about 70. The change is so little marked that light clothes can be worn day and night. Blankets are practically unknown, and the only bed-covering provided is one quilt. It is quite sufficient. But if the heat is lower than we often experience in Grafton it is of a peculiarly humid and enervating kind. The high minimum temperature and the continuity of the heat cause it to be very exhausting. Even a short walk "takes it out" of a stranger. After acclimatization one is said to stand it better. The white residents, however, mostly assert that no white man can do manual work there for any lengthy period. As is well known, the Federal Government, by the side wind of an educational test, prevents new aliens from arriving in Australian territory. So far the effect is not felt in Thursday Island. Indeed, owing to coloured labourers driven from the Queensland cane fields proceeding to Thursday Island the labour market is glutted for the present. In a few years, however, it will be felt, and the question will arise as to whether the pearling industry can be carried on by white labour. Most of the inhabitants assert that it cannot be so carried on for climatic and not monetary considerations. They aver that if no exemption is granted that the industry, so far as its present base of operations is concerned, must inevitably cease to exist, and Australia lose the

## Where various groups congregated

This interesting map shows where various groups congregated in the 1890s and is taken from the Appendix of *Navigating Boundaries*, p.317. (Where the map indicates Rose Hill, it probably means Milman Hill.)

Figure C: Map of Thursday Island, 1890s





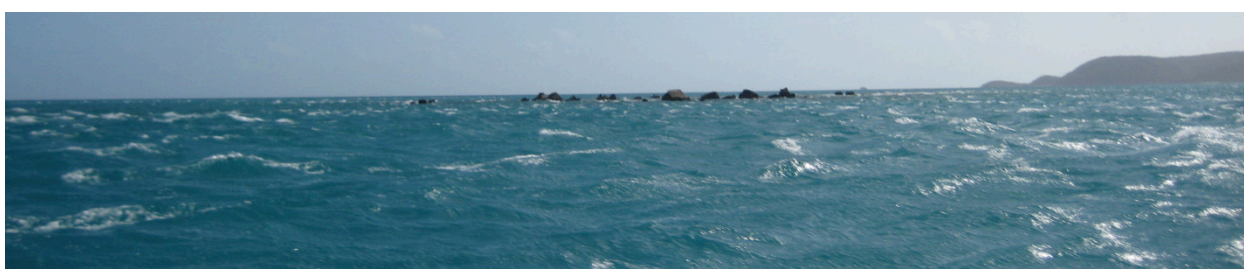
## Great calamity at sea, 1899

*"In 1899 a large fleet of pearling schooners and luggers were caught in Bathurst Bay, south of Torres Strait, when two cyclones converged on the area. Over 300 lives and 100 boats were lost in the maelstrom which struck at night without warning."*<sup>26</sup>

*The State Library of Queensland curator, Anna Haebich, posted on the net the following (copied 2011):*

*"On Saturday 4 March 1899 this category 5 cyclone caused one of Australia's worst natural disasters. Winds reached 260 kilometres an hour. A tsunami of 14.6 metres swept inland for 5 kilometres. The pearling fleet was smashed and over 400 people lost their lives. Most were Asian and Islander crew members. Only a handful of white men died. Some of the estimated 100 Aboriginal people killed were swept away at Cape Melville while assisting shipwrecked sailors. Sharks and dolphins were left hanging from trees and cliffs. Condolences came from around the world but few people today know of the disaster. Such is history's fickle memory that forgets events at distant places and deaths of unnamed strangers."*

We can only speculate how many Sacred Heart families would have been directly affected by this enormous tragedy, but it must have had a most devastating effect on the whole of Thursday Island as T.I. was the base from which most of the luggers would have initially set out.



## Pen picture of T.I., 1902

Thursday Island is always interesting, both from the mixture of races which form its population and from a natural point of view, for Nature has bestowed her favours with a bounteous hand. From any commanding position the view of the harbour is always a charming one—a lovely stretch of the brightest of blue water shading to a lighter hue as the water shoals over reefs, its surface rippled with little wavelets driven up by the fresh south-east monsoons, with here and there a white crest to animate the whole; a swift current sweeps through the pass as the half submerged buoys, tugging at their moorings, freely indicate. The dark background of Prince of Wales and the adjacent islands frame a picture of marvellous beauty, which will long remain in the memory of the spectator as a marine gem in a magnificent setting. Yes, Thursday Island can certainly claim to be the most picturesque portion of the Queensland coast.

The accompanying extract is from *The Queenslander*, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1902, and the by line is "St. George" and the article is titled, TORRES STRAITS. Good to see a pleasant suggestion that, "Yes. Thursday Island can certainly claim to be the most picturesque portion of the Queensland coast." And, "To the tourist a visit to Thursday Island – during the Winter months especially -- is a charming experience never to be forgotten." But particularly interesting is a mention of the scent of opium!:

*"What a strange mixture of the human race is to be found on Thursday Island. Almost all the nations of the world seem to be represented, the sound of strange tongues, the quaint garb of many lands, the peculiar aroma of opium which pervades the place and assails one's sense of smell at once gives it a distinct Eastern character."*

A fine jetty, constructed by the Government, affords berthing space for vessels of ordinary draught; those of greater tonnage anchor off Black Rock. This is a great convenience to visitors and passengers of the various lines of steamers that call in, doing away with the discomfort of transshipping into the Cingalese boats, a method that formerly obtained. A few small jetties are also available for the private use of the business firms.

And it will be noticed that the custom of visitors being bodily carried to the sand from dinghies has now (1902) come to the end through the completion of a "fine jetty."

<sup>26</sup> *Timeless Isle*, p.52

### Scene from 1895

The photo entitled “View of the Township, Thursday island, showing the Church”, is from the *Australian Town and Country Journal* of 2<sup>nd</sup> March, p.21. The church referred to is the Anglican Church, the “Quetta Church”. It is shown just to the right of the centre of the photo. The photo is one of two that accompanies an article on the Quetta Church, the other being an interior of the church. For those who know Thursday Island the challenge is now to identify some of the other buildings. Several of them must be the Catholic church, school, presbytery, convent, “orphanage” and possibly hospital (unless it had already been demolished to use its materials in the building of the school on Douglas Street.



View of the Township, Thursday Island, showing the Church.



(This copy of an early map, c.1900, was found in the T.I. Museum at Green Hill Fort. The original is in the Queensland State Archives.)





## CHAPTER 7

### Glimpses of the School, 1901-1920

#### Federation Celebrations, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1901

Part of Australia, though tiny and distant from Sydney, Thursday Island entered into the celebrations of the birth of Australia as a nation with gusto, and the school children were not an insignificant part of the joy of the occasion. The following extract from the *Torres Strait Pilot*<sup>1</sup> gives an introduction to the festivities:



***“Commonwealth and New Year Celebrations***

*Thursday Island more than held its own, comparatively, in celebrating the inauguration of the Commonwealth and the Twentieth century. The committee who had been appointed at the public meeting early in December had made excellent arrangements for a suitable demonstration, and for New Year's Day a long programme of sports, comprising over forty events for adults and children being drawn up and prizes allotted.”*



(The photo is of Centennial Park in Sydney on the occasion of the proclamation of the Federation of the Australian Colonies into the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1901.)

The article partly reproduced at the side tells of the Government Resident distributing medals “to the children of the State School.” However the following paragraph



tells of,

*“The procession of the children from the Customs House to the*

**NEW YEAR'S DAY.**  
A dead calm, with a hot steamy atmosphere, enough to burn the hide off a salamander, was experienced on Tuesday morning, and as the day grew older, the heat did not abate. The grateful shelter of clouds, however, minimised the effects of the sun, and permitted the sports to be carried on with a little less discomfort.  
The first item on the programme arranged was the distribution of medals to the children of the State School, and the hoisting of the Union Jack on the new flagstaff erected at the school, which latter ceremony was successfully photographed by Mr. A. Murray. All members of the School Committee were present, and Mr. Douglas briefly addressed the children on the importance of the occasion, and its lesson. At the conclusion of the flag-hoisting ceremony, cheers were given for the Commonwealth and the flag.  
The procession of children from the Custom House to the Sports Grounds followed the ceremony at the school. The order of march was along Douglas street, and thence along the Parade to the ground, and the children were headed by the banner, painted by Mr. Case, reproduced from the obverse figure of the Commonwealth medal, representing an arch of stones with the colonies names thereon, with Federation as the keystone. This banner is being presented to the local School of Arts, and will be an interesting memento of the occasion.

<sup>1</sup> January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1901.



*Sports Grounds followed the ceremony at the school. The order of march was along Douglas Street, and thence along the Parade to the ground, and the children were headed by a banner, painted by Mr. Case, reproduced from the obverse figure of the Commonwealth medal, representing an arch of stones with the colonies names thereon with Federation as the keystone."*

Numerous events were provided for the young folks, and the free and unlimited "tucker" provided them, and of which they are to unlimited degrees, seemed in no wise to discommode them. A special prize given by Mr. William M. Davies—a gold brooch—was won by little Lizzie Gummow, who received too big a start for her ability to run, in the easiest manner.

Almost certainly the Convent children would have been part of this procession.

The celebrations ended for the children with “*free and unlimited ‘tucker’ provided them*”, described in the very quaint phraseology of the time: “*of which they are to unlimited degrees, seemed in no wise to discommode them.*” It’s not known whether the lucky Lizzie Gummow was a student at the Sacred Heart school.

In September, 1901, there appeared a strange announcement for children in the *Torres Strait Pilot*. It is reproduced here without further comment (Simply follow the large words in bold).

[illegible]

*convent and school."*

The reference here to “unpretentious” and “little” supports the belief that it is describing a building other than the one well represented in photos at least from the 1920s to the twenty-first century. A sketch of the church on T.I. reproduced here from Cardinal Moran’s *History of the Church in Australasia*<sup>3</sup>, shows the church or chapel having merely three windows on the side walls, whereas, at the time of writing, and from photos from the 1920s, it has eight windows on each side. The sketch, however, also seems to show the chapel built of irregular stone

The article on the New Year celebrations is from the *Torres Strait Pilot* of January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1901, and the Competition is from the same newspaper of September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1901.

In April there was also a Grand Ball in the Town Hall to commemorate the opening of Parliament. And on June 1<sup>st</sup> in the *Torres Strait Pilot* there was the announcement of a holiday for the 8<sup>th</sup> June in honour of HRH the Duke of York's birthday.

## Description of T.I., 1902

In February, 1902, there appeared a rather cynical and lengthy article in the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*<sup>2</sup> with a description of life on Thursday Island. It is not greatly different in substance from that given in 1899. But it did have this mention of the church:

*"There are two Churches, a Roman Catholic and a Church of England. The former is a prettily situated unpretentious little building belonging to the Sacred Heart Mission, which also maintains a*



<sup>2</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1902, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Moran, Patrick, Francis Cardinal, *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, Sydney, The Oceanic Publishing Company Limited, c.1890, Plate 8, p.345.

whereas “Wanderer” writing in the *Sydney Echo* in October, 1885 states: “Nor is the church yet of timber. It is still a tabernacle of tin, though with some architectural distinctions; and late and early, every morning and evening, since I have arrived on the island I hear the tintinnabular summons to prayer of the good fathers of the French Mission.”

### Building of new church, 1902-1903

Two references in the *Torres Straits Pilot* pinpoint when the “present” (2012) church was built. The first is on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1902, where we read: “Pending the erection of the new building of the church of the Sacred Heart, services will be held in the schoolroom.” And later, in the issue of January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1903: “The Sacred Heart Mission had their services in the Convent Schoolroom, the new building not being sufficiently advanced.” From this it might well be assumed that the church was completed during 1903; possibly early in 1903.



Pending the erection of the new building for the church of the Sacred Heart, services will be held in the schoolroom. On Sunday morning at the offertory a duet for clarinet and violin will be performed.

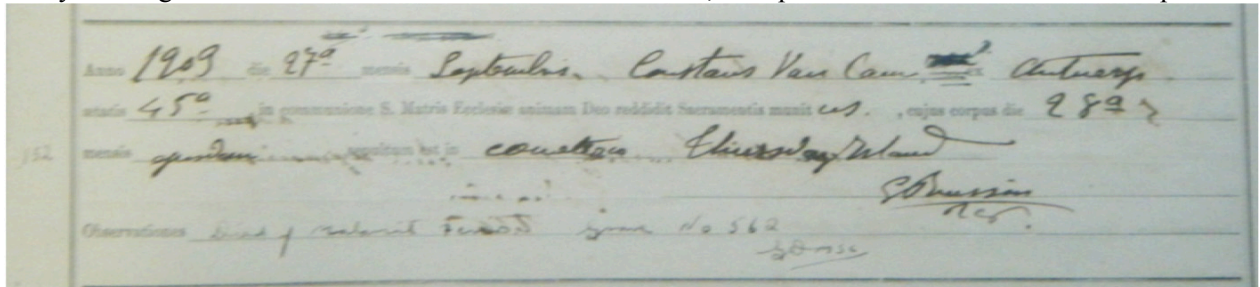
The Sacred Heart Mission, had their special services in the Convent Schoolroom, the new building not being sufficiently advanced. The Quetta Cathedral services were conducted by the Vicar, Mr. Glover, the usual Christmas hymns being sung, and the sermons being in accord with season.

A number of short histories of T.I. and references in tourist brochures and pamphlets declare that the Sacred Heart Church is the oldest building on T.I. This is surely not correct unless the building mentioned in these references is considered to be the same building, while merely undergoing renovations. The mention in the 1903 extract to “the new building” suggests, however, a new building.

The photo of the church interior was provided by the Sisters’ Archives in Rome, and the wall behind the altar displays no decoration. We will later see that the wall was subsequently painted, once with designs (in the 1920s), and then in 1935 with the murals that are known today (2012). The side walls previously had interesting decorations. In 1955 Father McDermott had the church painted and mentioned in a letter<sup>4</sup>, “The T.I. Church has just been painted interiorly; the first time in 50 years for the walls which previously were covered with hessian, Sydney newspapers of 1901 vintage stenciled over very effectively.”

### Death of Brother Constant Van Cam, September, 1903

Virtually nothing is known about Brother Constant Van Cam, except details of his death. We can presume,



however, that like the Brothers of his time he would have done a lot of manual, building and maintenance work. And since his date of death (from malarial fever) closely follows the time of the building of the present (2012) church, it might well be presumed that he assisted with the building of the church that we know more than 100 years later.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Deere, un-numbered pages.



### Sister Mary Ursula Maxwell, on T.I. from 1902 to 1925

Sister Ursula Maxwell served the children and the people on Thursday Island from 1902 to 1925. The reader, continuing this narrative, must imagine Sister Ursula in the thick of the many twists and turns of the following 23 years: earthquakes, Empire Day celebrations, visits by School Inspectors, exam successes, The First World War and support of the Red Cross, teaching and supervising physical exercises, coping with the death of a Sister in the community along with the hum-drum of revision of spelling, hearing of Catechism answers, singing lessons, reminders to keep books neat and handwriting careful, preparation for the Sacraments, etc. etc. And to give some specific details of just some of Sister Mary Ursula's preparation of the children at the end of her first year, the reader may care to glance at the press report of the Convent concerts for 1903 and 1904<sup>5</sup>.



### Orchestral and Children's Concerts, 1904, 1905, 1906

In July, 1905 the *Torres Strait Pilot*<sup>6</sup> advised:

*"We have pleasure in announcing that the Orchestral Society are giving another of their popular instrumental and vocal entertainments in the School of Arts on Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> August. From portion of the proceeds of the last concert some new music has been purchased by the Orchestra, and this will be rendered at the forthcoming concert. The proceeds will be donated to a very deserving charitable institution – the Orphanage of the Sacred Heart Mission. A dance will eventuate after the musical programme for holders of front seat tickets only. The price of admission is very moderate and we are confident that a packed house will be the result. The Orchestra has been numerically strengthened since the last concert."*

And in August, 1905, we read, *"The Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart desire to return their sincere thanks to the members of the Orchestral Society for the sum of 16 pounds, 18 shillings, result of their Concert in aid of the Orphanage and also to all who have helped in making it a success."*<sup>7</sup>



(The photo of boats on the slips is taken from a series of photos posted on the net by Bobnzell and is dated 1908.)

<sup>5</sup> *Torres Strait Pilot*, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1903; November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1905.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, July 22<sup>nd</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, August 19<sup>th</sup>.

## CONVENT CHILDREN'S CONCERT

Two or three more evenings like that of last Thursday and Thursday Island people will have to seek for a remedy against fatness, if the proverb be true, "Laugh and grow fat." If we must measure success by the amount of hearty pleasure one gets, no doubt the last concert was a huge success, and it deserved to be so; from the smallest baby girl with a tiny voice to the biggest man with his powerful trumpet, all and one tried their best and hit the mark. To begin with the beginning, a new feature in the local concerts were the two overtures rendered by five brass instruments; these two selections had the effect of a generous drop of sparkling wine, and infused life into the very walls of the concert room. The three choruses by the Convent pupils were sung with a precision and a "maestria," very remarkable considering the age of the performers; one was regretting the absence of tenor and bass parts to give some relief to the children's voices. The pupils also gave a good exhibition of their skill in dumbbells and clubs drill; ask a military instructor, and he would tell you that his recruits do not very often attain this degree of proficiency in so short a time. We must not omit mentioning the "Scene in a railway train" which created much laughter. As for the "solis," it is not too much to say they all were nicely rendered and warmly received. Miss Ethel Braund sang "Ben Bolt," and was asked to give it again. What is so pleasing in this young artiste is a clear enunciation; and the child's voice rings out very clear and pure in tone. Miss Gummow gave "Mona" with great feeling and a voice full of promise if properly cultivated; she was encored, and with justice. We hope to hear her again. Miss Lizzie Simpson is an habitu   of the Convent

## EMBER 12. 1904.

### CONVENT SCHOOL CONCERT.

The pupils of the Convent School, assisted by the Garrison Band, gave in the Victoria Memorial Hall on Wednesday night, the King's Birthday, that annual entertainment which is always so eagerly expected and so well appreciated. The success was splendid. The hall was packed with an audience kept in a state of sympathetic attention throughout the evening. The programme submitted was excellent, and its successful rendering showed the skilled patience and devotedness which has been displayed by the good sisters towards their pupils.

The Garrison Band, which contributed to a great extent to the enjoyment of the entertainment, deserves great praise the way their selections were rendered under the direction of Bandmaster Mr. D. Hyde, and the overtures—in the first part "Sydney by Night," and in the second "Mount Washington"—rendered by them, were received with great applause.

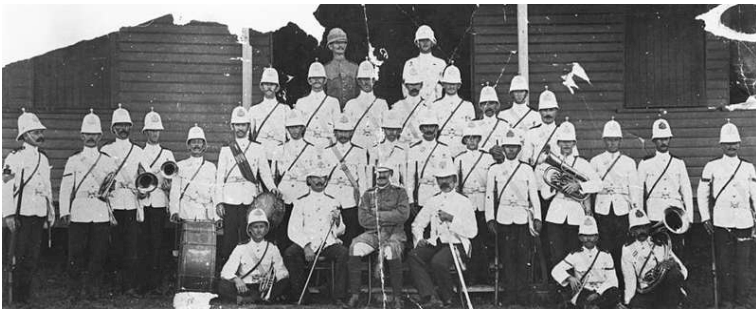
In the cantata, "A Quarrel among the Flowers," all the characters, from the beautiful "Rose" and stately "Dahlia" to the sweet "Violet," were rendered admirably. The recitations were remarkably distinct; "Little Orphan Annie" by Master Gussie Ah Sange was given with a coolness and strength very unusual in one so diminutive; while little Sophie Beryholtz's fearful telling of the fate of "Charlotte Russ" caused much appreciative laughter. The "Inventor's Wife," Miss Lucy Simpson, was most natural and amusing.

## 7 – Glimpses of the School 1901-1920

Among the choruses we must notice "We Tars," by the boys in sailor costumes. "Beautiful Flowers" and the "Fairies' Moonlight Song" were evidently much appreciated; the actions in both were made the more effective by the dainty dresses of the little ones, some of whom were really like fairies. "What would you take for me, Papa?" rendered by Misses Phyllis Gerard and Eileen Schrimpf, two tiny mites, received a well-deserved encore; and the hall resounded with the laughter of the audience at Masters George Ah Sange and Alberto Lachica in "The Waiters." The musical drills were very good, and it is hard to say which was best, the boys with their flags, or the girls with their tambourines, bells, rings, &c. "Mother Goose," with "her children all so dear," was well received, and kept the audience in a roar of laughter for all too short a quarter of an hour; and a pleasant time was concluded by the singing of the "National Anthem."

Misses F. MacMahon and Bowers acted as accompanists throughout the evening.

The Sisters of O.L. of the S.H. desire to thank the members of the Garrison Band, R.A.A., and all those who contributed by their kind assistance to the enjoyment of the evening, especially Mr. G. Gummow for providing the acetylene light.



(The photo of the T.I. Garrison Band, which contributed to the Convent Concert in 1904, is taken from the net from a posting by the National Library of Australia)

The reader may enjoy reading the reviews of the Convent School's Concerts of 1903 and 1904 reproduced from the *Torres Strait Pilot*. Note the prominent mention of the presence and contribution of the Garrison Band.

Twice in the *The Torres Straits Pilot* write-up of the concert of Friday 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1906 (see box) is the mention of hard times being experienced by the island. Just what this consisted of is not known at the time of writing. Considering the often mentioned propensity of the schoolchildren to speak too softly<sup>8</sup> it is interesting to note that the concert appears to have consisted mainly of two spoken dramatic works. It might be speculated that the Sisters may have found preparing and rehearsing plays to be a way to get the children to speak out. It's interesting, too, to see the selection of a farcical piece to be chosen in spite of – maybe to counteract – the "depressed times."

The Sacred Heart School children's entertainment on Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> instant maintained the good character of former years, notwithstanding the difficulty of bad times, and in every way it proved comparatively to be as successful as any previously held, though the island is suffering from depressed times. The first part included a number of items rendered by the pupils in a way surpassing all previous efforts, and concluded with a farcical piece entitled "John and Co.," capably portrayed. The chief item of the second part was a dramatic effort, "The Organ-grinder," all parts of which were well sustained, and afforded a pleasant half-hour to the audience. A Dance concluded the evening many staying till a late hour.

<sup>8</sup> Notice in the Inspector's Report of 1905, reproduced in this chapter in facsimile, is the following: "Reading and recitation are lacking in clearness and expression and many of the pupils answer inaudibly."



## Insights into 1908

The diary entry of a fellow from New England in NSW sailing around the world gives a little insight into life as he saw it on T.I. in 1908.<sup>9</sup> After sending his luggage to one of the hotels he decided, after “*our tour of inspection*” of the town, “*to return to the boat and suffer the ills of unloading cargo all night rather than fly to others of which we only had suspicions.*” There were twelve cows on the ship that he was travelling on, being taken to Sourabaya, and he kindly thought of bringing some milk as a treat for his hosts on shore at the Residency. “*And there is not a cow on the island, so you can imagine how it will be appreciated.*”

He concludes his diary entry with a remark that might be applied to the adventurous Sisters at the school:

“*This is no place for a white woman, and yet there are many here, making the best of things with commendable pluck and endurance.*”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the very first Sisters in 1886, wrote back to their superior in

France: “*We are all very well, in spite of the extreme heat.*”<sup>11</sup>



### Sister M. Adrienne Derroz,

Little is known of Sister Mary Adrienne (pictured left) except that she was part of the community and school in 1909 and dies during that year. She is buried in the Thursday Island cemetery. As can be seen the cross on the grave is in disrepair and in need of restoration at the time of researching (2011).

### Population, 1902-1903

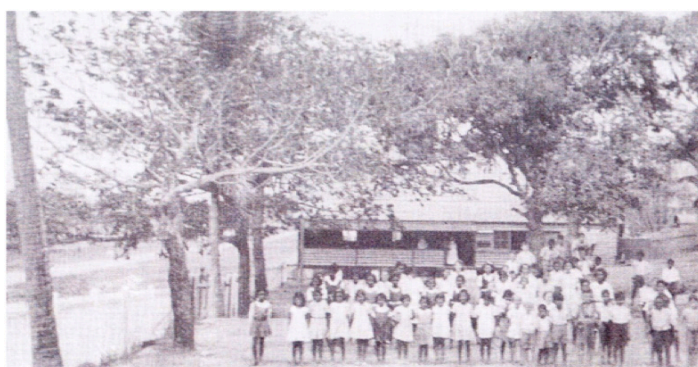
“...it is gratifying to observe that there has been a marked increase in the number of white children, the number being, respectively, 241 in 1902 and 293 in 1903.”<sup>12</sup>

That number surely far exceeds the number of schoolchildren. What does “children” mean in the figures? Is it young people under the age of 18? If so, many would be working, particularly the older boys, on the luggers.

But a curious remark is made by the Government Resident, John Douglas, respected, as far as can be learned, as a fair and thoughtful man. In his Report of early 1903 he remarks:

“*It is perhaps unnecessary for me to comment on these figures [all the figures regarding population, not just children] than to say that I have no fear of the absolute ascendancy of the white race not being maintained.*”

## Inspectors' Reports, 1905, 1907 and 1909



It's marvellous to be able to read the Inspectors' Reports as such Reports are usually impossible to find so many years later. The 1905 is the earliest Report located so far (to 2011) and is reproduced in facsimile for the interest of the reader.

Of note is the school roll: 54 children. “*This school is conducted,*” the Inspector remarks, “*with zeal and energy.*” And in another place mentions, “*The pleasant earnest tone is manifest in all classes. Good order is maintained. The*

*discipline is kind and effective and the various class movements are smoothly and quickly executed.*”

There is mention that the changes required of the “new syllabus” have not yet been effected. (It will be interesting for the researcher to find this syllabus and its requirements.)

While there is mention in 1905 of “*many of the coloured children*”, there is no break-down of white and coloured. But the short Report by Inspector Taylor (visited 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> Sept., 1907) mentions, with a quaint

<sup>9</sup> Brown, Lindon, *Letters from an Australian abroad*, Parramatta, The Cumberland Argus Printing Works, 1910, Pp. 4-5. This entry: December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1908.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., P.5.

<sup>11</sup> Hartzler, Fernand and Leopold, *Fire on the Earth*, Sydney, E.J. Dwyer, 1948, p.61. Originally written in French in approx. 1913.

<sup>12</sup> Reported in *The Brisbane Courier*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1903, p.14.

expression of the early twentieth century: *“Considering the large number of alien children attending the school, the efforts made and the results attained are alike praiseworthy.”*

There is mention of a theme that will recur as the years pass, and that relates to the shyness and lack of confidence (according to European standards) in reading aloud. The 1905 Report includes the observation: *“Reading and recitation are lacking in clearness and expression and many of the pupils answer inaudibly.”*

There is mention of the variety of backgrounds of the children in Inspector Smith’s Report in March, 1909:

*“Owing to the various races attending this school the work is necessarily more difficult than it is where all the pupils are of European parentage. Still good work is being done and the Sisters are deserving of praise for the earnestness with which they carry on the work.”*

In 1910 we are given a figure on the proportion of white to coloured children:

*“In some classes the age is high for the time in the draft but the teaching is heavily handicapped by the high percentage of coloured children; on the day of inspection forty per cent of the children were Phillipino, Chinese, Islanders, and combinations of these and others.”*

And in the Report of 1911 the proportion of coloured children is given as *“nearly 60%”*.

From the twenty-first century it seems amusing that the Inspector might remark adversely on methods of teaching of mathematics in 1909 being *“old-fashioned.”* The entire paragraph deserves recording:

*“Arithmetic seems to have been taught on rather old-fashioned lines. The work done was mechanical and consequently the children when examined according the spirit of the syllabus did poorly both in mental and in slate work. Strenuous efforts should be made to adopt up-to-date methods in arithmetic. Problems should be the rule not the exception.”*



It’s interesting to note that in 1910, the Inspector, Mr. Earnshaw, remarked that *“Class VI should have more practice in writing business and official letters.”* The children would have been little more than 12 or 13 years old! But it is good to note that *“Songs are rendered sweetly and tunefully.”*

(The Sisters in this photo are Sisters Lucy, Xavier and Hyacinth. While the photo is undated it is believed that they would have ministered at Sacred Heart School in the early years of the twentieth century)

## Moves towards segregated State schools, 1906

A development in the history of primary education on Thursday Island is foreshadowed in an editorial in the *Torres Straits Pilot* and a report from a meeting with the Premier of Queensland in May, 1906. The editor and owner of the *Torres Straits Pilot*, Mr. Alexander Corran, from his writings, always appeared to be a fair and tolerant man. It comes as a surprise, then, to read in an editorial<sup>13</sup>:

*“We hear on the most reliable authority that a question that has caused a great deal of heart-burning in the past is about to receive some attention from the Education Department, for the subject of white children having to sit cheek by jowl with coloured at the State School is being considered by the Minister. We hope the School Committee will take the matter up, and persevere in bringing it to a successful issue, as it is unquestionably necessary that the degrading influences surrounding the mixed character of the attendance at the school should be separated. It requires only a united effort on the part of all interested to have the desired end attained.”*

Then in a delegation by the Schools Committee directly to the Premier who was visiting T.I. we read<sup>14</sup>:

*“The State School Committee asked that there should be a separation of white and full-blooded coloured children in connection with the attendance at the school; a matter which was before the Minister for Education, and to forward which his influence was requested.”*

<sup>13</sup> May 5<sup>th</sup>.

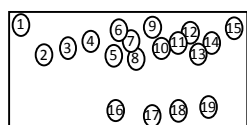
<sup>14</sup> *Torres Straits Pilot*, May 19<sup>th</sup>.



(We'll learn later that the resolution of this matter was in the formation in 1913 of a School for coloured children, called "Waiben School". This lasted till 1963.)

### Sister Thecla Keogh, 1912-1929

The Sisters' archives in Rome mentions that Sister Thecla was part of the T.I. Community and companion of Sister Ursula for a number of years, and the portrait photo of Sr. Thecla comes from there. And a notation on the back of the photo with the children indicates that Sister Thecla is the Sister on the right.



In spite of the photo being from so long ago, Cecilia O'Brien (Sabatino), was able to identify a number of the children, one being her own mother.

(2. Marie Garnier, 5. Edie Nicholls, 6. Marcellina Kanak, 8. Julie McBride, 13 Mary Nicholls, 15. Sister Thecla, 19 Camilla Dorante.)

### Mention of a High School on T.I., 1906

An interesting development in the history of schooling on Thursday Island is the establishment of the "Diocesan High School for Boys and Girls" as announced by the attached advertisement in the *Torres Pilot* of July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1906. "Diocesan" refers to the Anglican Diocese, not the Catholic.

In the same issue of the *Pilot* was an editorial that commended the establishment of a High School with the words: "*The need for an institution of the kind has long been apparent; and once successfully started, there should be a fair appreciation of its utility, obviating as it does to a considerable extent the expense and other desirable features of sending young people to schools in the south.*"

A report on the opening of the school is given in the *Torres Pilot* of July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1906.

The impact of this school and the Night School on the children and families attending the Convent school is not known. Nor how long the school lasted.

**Diocesan High School**  
For Boys and Girls,  
THURSDAY ISLAND.

Principal: MISS ROBSON  
(Late PRINCIPAL of the PREPARATORY SCHOOL FOR BOYS,  
DARLINGHURST SYDNEY).

The School will be Open on  
Monday Next, 16th July.

HOURS: 9.15 A.M. TO 12.30 P.M.  
2 P.M. TO 3.30 P.M.

**FEES:**  
The Fees originally announced will be reduced to the following:—  
Under 10, £1 1s.; under 14, £2 2s.; over 14, £3 8s. per quarter; with reduction of 10 per cent. for members of the same family.

The SCHOOL COURSE will include without extra charge the following Subjects:—English, Geography, History, Mathematics, Drawing, French, and Latin. Stationery and Books extra. Music, £2 2s. extra.

Religious Instruction will be given; but children may be exempted at the written request of their parents.

Accounts will be sent out at the end of the first month, and it is expected they should then be paid.

**NIGHT SCHOOL.**  
A Night School for Elder Scholars will be started shortly.  
Names should be sent to the Hon. Secretary,  
Mr. Stuart Cayage.

Department of Public Instruction, Queensland  
 Report of Inspection  
 of the  
 Thursday Island Roman Catholic School.  
 Inspected June 6th. 1905.

Number of Pupils present, 54.

This school is conducted with zeal and energy. Fair progress is being made although the changes required by the new syllabus have not yet been effected.

Difficulty is experienced in ascertaining the correct ages of many of the coloured children so that the entries in the Roll Books respecting age, are incomplete and unreliable. Attendances are correctly recorded. The planning of the lessons in the work book is capable of improvement and a more suitable time table is required. The classification could be simplified with much advantage.

A pleasant earnest tone is manifest in all classes. Good order is maintained. The discipline is kind and effective and the various class movements are smoothly and quietly executed.

Reading and recitation are lacking in clearness and expression and many of the pupils answer inaudibly.

The teaching is patient and persevering. Fairly satisfactory results are obtained but the self-activity of the pupils should be utilised to a greater extent than it is. The introduction of Observation Talks and Picture Talks in the lower classes should prove of great advantage. "Answering in complete sentences" should be more extensively practised.

Clement J. Fox  
 District Inspector.



## Earthquakes, June, October and November, 1907

### EARTHQUAKE AT THURSDAY ISLAND.

At 10 minutes to 7 o'clock on the morning of October 28th one of the most severe shocks of earthquake yet felt was experienced at Thursday Island. The Torres Straits "Pearler," describing the occurrence, says:—"More alarming even than the vibrations, which continued for about 20 seconds, was the terrifying underground commotion, which could only be compared to the repeated firing of a battery of artillery. Up to yesterday morning (Nov. 1) there has been a continuation at irregular intervals of slight shocks, always accompanied by an explosive sound. The shock was felt at Cape York and in all the surrounding islands, especially at Goode Island, where the glass of the lighthouse was much damaged." During the past year there have been three or four different shocks of earthquake at Thursday Island, all of a more or less severe character.

Several disturbing earthquakes were experienced on T.I. in 1907. Reporting one in June, the *Torres Straits Pilot*<sup>15</sup> recorded: "The first quake was a great startler, and travelled from North-east to South-west, many people becoming excited and scared."

Imagine the commotion in the dormitory in the Orphanage when the earth and building again shook soon after midnight on a November night in 1907! "Sister, what was that?" "What's happening?" We can imagine the Sisters, themselves probably frightened, trying to reassure the children. The press report reproduced in facsimile is from *The Queenslander* of Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1907.<sup>16</sup>

Other earthquakes occurred on T.I. and further research is needed on finding out more about them.

## Scholarship winner, 1907

228	143	4	30	78	17	32	161	25.8	Price, Ralph Clyde Farren	Albany Stn (B.)
229	298	37	28	46	23	25	159	25.4	Brett, Geo Neville	Thursday Island
	345	29	37	73	3	17	159	25.4	Cahill, Martin	Ch. Towers Chris Bros
231	165	18	32	44	20	43	157	25.1	Jorgensen, Jens Peter	Cordalba

It is not known if Geo. Neville Brett is a Convent or a State School boy.<sup>17</sup>

The reader may find interest in reading the Inspector's Report for 1907. It's interesting to note the quaint English expression of the time in referring to the non-European children in the school as "alien children".

Note, too, that in 1907 there were 50 children attending the school.

## Empire Day, 1908

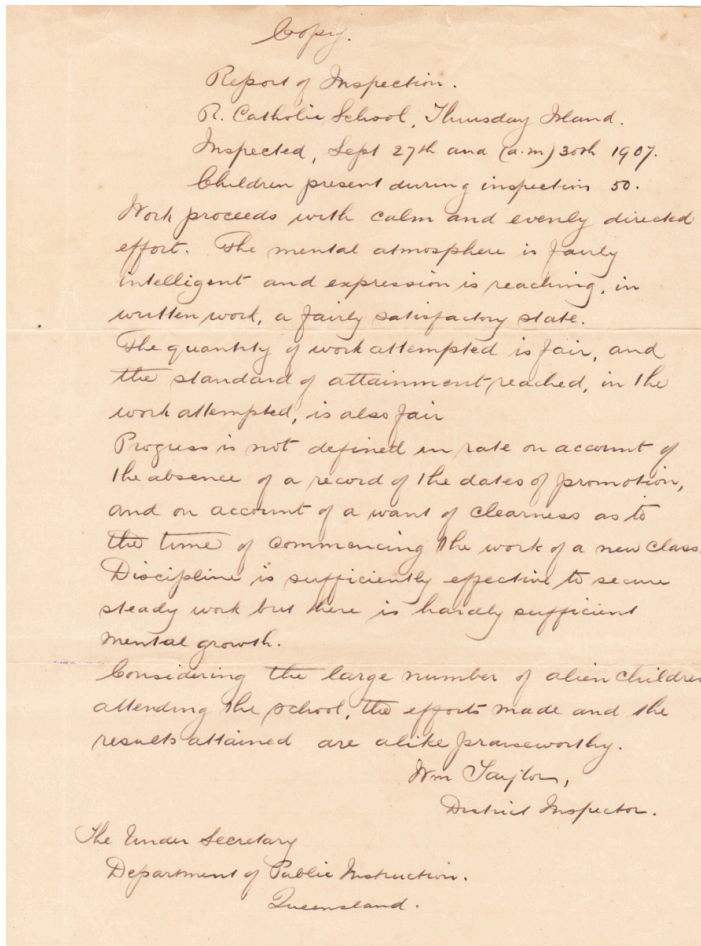
As mentioned earlier it is most probable that the Sisters encouraged the children to participate fully in British celebrations such as "Empire Day." In the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* of Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1908<sup>18</sup>, we read:

<sup>15</sup> June 29<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> P.33.

<sup>17</sup> Queensland State Archives.

<sup>18</sup> P.3.



"Even our next door neighbor, Thursday Island, appears to have risen to the occasion [of Empire Day], and the Torres Strait Pilot of the 16<sup>th</sup> inst. devotes a whole column of type to giving a summary of the programme decided upon at a meeting of the citizens held at the local School of Arts. This comprised the assemblage of the T.I. juveniles at the Victoria Hall, where a guard of men from the R.A.A. were to be drawn up ... In the afternoon there was to be the sports for the juveniles on the reserve in front of the drill hall. Other items were a tableaux vivants entertainment in the evening, in which some of the main incidents in the history of the British Empire were to be portrayed."

### Scholarship winners, 1908

Mary Jane O'Donoghue passed the Scholarship exam in 1908. As mentioned previously it is not known whether this girl attended Sacred Heart School or the State School. The facsimile extract from the list of names is taken from the Records in the State Archives of Queensland. The names are listed in the order of merit and Mary Jane, as can be seen, came 116<sup>th</sup>. This is an enormous

achievement considering it is against every girl in Queensland. The boys were listed separately.

Wm. John Graham, also from Thursday Island, passed the Scholarship exam in 1908, being placed 217<sup>th</sup> in the order of merit.

1908	148	7	39	39	48	45	178	274	Keag, Ada	Harfaxton	114
	504	26	41	46	33	29	175	269	Mynott, Mildred Florence	Port Curtis Road	115
	423	50	10	65	27	19	171	263	O'Donoghue, Mary Jane	Thursday Isld	116
	491	17	23	57	34	37	168	258	Battersby, Veronica Marie	mt. Morgan (Q. V.)	117
	547	31	38	49	18	30	165	255	Sawyer Lillian Hilda	monkland	118
	476	57	22	23	21	42	165	254	Waddell, Mary	Gympie Two mile	119
1908	316	43	42	36	43	34	198	305	Hull, Eversley Munro	Tarniga	216
	140	55	32	26	41	43	197	303	Graham, Wm John	Thursday Isld.	217
	221	27	20	45	57	46	195	30	Milligan, Herbert Valentine	Eagle Junction	218
1913	798	142	55	98	40	56	391	602	Whitten, Olive	Indooroopilly	62
	729	129	41	86	50	82	388	597	George, Blanche	Thursday Island	63
	855	116	49	102	55	65	387	595	Hawkins, Jennie	Brisbane St. G. of	64
	704	128	59	69	65	64	385	592	Barkus, Dorothy O.	Dunellan	65



1918	1340	✓ Moy, Grace Ellen	Taroom	Taroom
	1341	✓ Reynolds, Margaret Ellen	"	"
	1342	✓ Hennessey, Lucy Margaret	Thursday Island	Thursday Island
	1343	✓ Burnett Vivian	Colinton	Toogoolawah
	1344	✓ Francis Isabel	"	"
	1345	✓ Coleman Dorothy May	Toogoolawah	"
	1346	✓ Watherston, Elizabeth Margaret	Bergen	Toowoomba

Yet again, it should be noted, that at the time of writing (2011) it is not known which students may have attended the Convent school and which the State School.



Note in the Inspector's Report of 1911 there is mention of "Drill" involving "wand, dumbbell and Indian Club". The present researcher (2011) is unfamiliar with "wand" unless it is a wand with a long tape attached to it as is seen in Olympic Games performances. But the dumbbells and Indian Clubs are known. These were physical education exercises for boys and were usually done in unison and in groups. The clubs, similar to Ten Pin bowling pins, were held by the fingers at the narrow end and then twirled around the arms and head in different patterns, often to music.

By 1912 there were 56 children in the school.<sup>19</sup> And it is recorded that the senior boys are doing wood carving while the girls are sewing very creditably. And the Sisters have obviously taken up the suggestion of earlier reports that noted the absence of illustrations around the rooms that now there are "*useful illustrations on the walls.*" Physical exercises, "*are confined to Dumb-bell and Indian Club exercises*" and there is a call for "*Physical Drill and Deep breathing exercises*" to be practised for a short time daily.

General remarks for 1913 tell us: "*The discipline and general tone of the school are good. The pupils being attentive, obedient, responsive and polite. Assembly and marching into school are well done.*" And while "*School songs are sung very sweetly and good progress is made in voice training and singing at sight,*" it was noted that there was no school garden. And there is the first mention in 1913 of "a good tennis court."

One of the most positive comments on schoolwork to date comes in the Inspector's Report of 1914:<sup>20</sup> "*The writing of 1<sup>st</sup> IV is exceptionally good.*" (The same favourable expression is used again in 1915 for 1<sup>st</sup> III Arithmetic.) And a complaint that has been mentioned in previous reports is repeated here: "*It is to be regretted that Object Lessons and Picture Talks are not given. These quicken the perceptive faculties, and are an aid to oral and written Composition.*"

A remark that conjures up interesting images in the reader is under the heading of "School Games and Physical Exercises": "*These are well taught by an instructor from the garrison.*" The Garrison was a formidable institution on Thursday Island from the 1890s when the fortifications were built and a large number of soldiers was housed in substantial two-storey buildings between the school and Green Hill. The image of an "instructor" from the garrison summons up the image of a stern red-faced sergeant-major roaring at children under the age of twelve! We later learn<sup>21</sup> he was Sergeant Shegog of the Garrison Artillery.

<sup>19</sup> Inspector's Report, R.G. Skelton, 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1912.

<sup>20</sup> Inspector B.M. McKenna, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

<sup>21</sup> Inspector McKenna's Report of November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1915

## Department of Public Instruction, Queensland.

Report of Inspection of the R.L. School at Thursday Island, No. —Inspected 23<sup>rd</sup> pm + 24<sup>th</sup> Aug 1911. Present, 20 B. 31 G. 57 Total.

**Records:** The records are accurate, neat and nearly complete. The school is quietly and firmly controlled and the children are obedient and polite. Good discipline is maintained.

**Government:** generally, although at times there is a tendency to talk. The organization is defective in classification. From Class I to II, there are five drafts each only six months apart. This is a loss of

**Organization:** teaching power. The time in classes is, in some cases, excessive due partly to the large proportion (nearly 60%) of coloured children. The Work Book is only partly made up. In Nature Study, History & Drawing the entries are general so to be of little use. In Class II no entries were made for the first half of the year and there is no Work Book for Class I. It is important that the work should be carefully planned and something definitely attempted in a given time.

**Proficiency and Progress of Pupils:** Records of periodical exams should be entered.

**Methods:** The methods are fair and applied with much energy & earnestness. They should be improved as indicated during inspection to give more scope to the self activity of the pupil.

**Proficiency & Progress:** The best results were obtained in Reading, Writing, Spelling, Dictation, Home Exercises, Drill & the Singing of Songs. Also in Comprehension of Reading and Recitation in Classes II, III & IV; Composition, Dictation & History in II, Tables and Mapping in II, Dictation in II and Notation in I. The weakest work is in Nature Study & Object Lessons which need re-organizing in all classes to make them really educational. Geography in IV, Arithmetic & Recitation in I, II & III. The singing is very good and tuneful. Other subjects are fair. In Drawing more should be done from objects & less from copies. In Class III is not sufficient. Coloured throughout the school. The globe work - writing and figures - is very neat and good.

**Care of Grounds:** The school room is neat and cheerful, well ventilated & spacious. There is no library.

**School Games and Physical Exercises:** The drill is varied - wands, dumbbell & Indian Club exercises - and well executed but deep breathing exercises have not yet been commenced.

**General Condition:** Satisfactory.

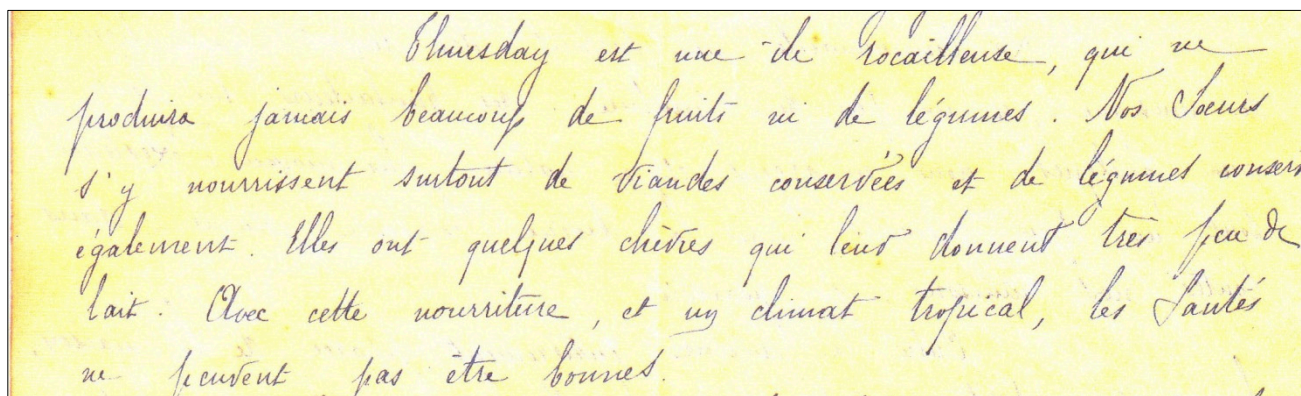
GENERAL REMARKS.

W. Earnshaw



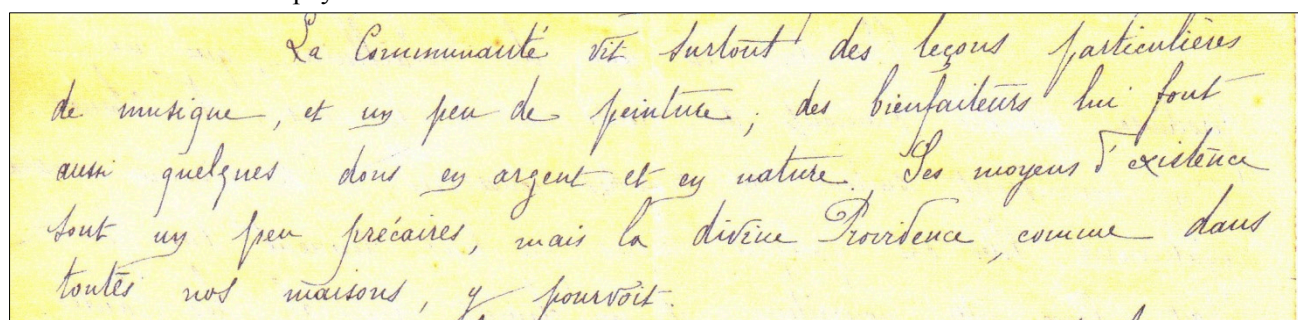
## Visitation

The Sisters enjoyed a formal “Visitation” in 1912 by two Sisters from their General House<sup>22</sup>, calling in to see how they were going, give encouragement, and reporting back to Headquarters in central France.



The above extract, in French, tells of the Sister’s diet. In translation it reads: “Thursday is a rocky island which never produces much fruit and vegetables. Our Sisters mostly live on tinned meat and vegetables. They have several goats which produce little milk. With this food and tropical climate they can’t get overweight on that.”

A further extract from this report of Visitation in 1912 sheds light on how the Sisters were financed. It first of all tells of the original intended arrangements for payment by the parents for their children in the “orphanage”, but notes that most don’t pay.



The above extract states: “The Community lives on payment for music and painting lessons, on gifts from benefactors in money and in kind. It makes existence a little precarious, but with Divine Providence, as in our other houses, we get by.”

Changes noted in the 1915 Report tell of the singing being well taught by the Parish Priest. This was Father Joseph Bach, a most musical name<sup>23</sup>. And now that the First World War had begun it is well here to note that

Father Bach had been granted Australian citizenship in 1907 and,

“was appointed Chaplain 4<sup>th</sup> Class in the Royal Australian Naval Reserve in 1909 for service at Thursday Island. As such he would have had a special ministry to soldiers and sailors during World War I when troops and warships were assembled in the Thursday Island area.”<sup>24</sup>



But a quaint mention in the 1915 Report tells of the children’s contribution to the War effort: “Pupils from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Class upwards have been knitting industriously during the year for the soldiers, and the quality and quantity of the work done for the Red Cross society deserves the highest praise.”

<sup>22</sup> Originals held in the Sisters’ archives in Rome.

<sup>23</sup> Father Joseph Bach was a long-time resident as Parish Priest of T.I. He was prominent in the musical life of the island and in other capacities, including as Chaplain to the soldiers during the War. Thursday Island honoured him with naming the beach near the hospital after him: “Bach Beach”. However it is universally known on T.I. as “Back Beach”!

<sup>24</sup> Littleton, James, M.S.C., *Sacred Heart Mission Torres Strait 1884-1967*, Fyshwick, ACT, 2009, pp.25-6.

(The picture of the child knitting is not of a Thursday Island child but it is taken from an article on children knitting for the soldiers, and brings to mind that T.I. children were involved in this work.)

The Report of 1916 notes that, *“The work done for the Red Cross is even better than last year, pupils having now become very proficient knitting.”*

1916 is a year of a particularly good Report of Inspection and it is reproduced on another page in full.

There is mention in the 1916 Report that “Provision is made for the teaching of Book-keeping, Shorthand, Typewriting and Algebra to senior pupils.” Since this is not referred to in the body of the Report where each school subject is mentioned it is thought by the present researcher that these subjects were offered outside school hours, and possibly a special fee was paid. More research needs to be undertaken on this matter.

And also in 1916 is mention of an “asphalt” tennis court being well used by the children. There was previous mention of a tennis court but not that it was asphalt.

(The photo of “Main St.”, from the State Library of Queensland is from this period. It may be that the roof seen to the left of the church spire is the roof of the “Orphanage”.)



The photo of children on the balcony of the “Orphanage” was supplied from the Sisters’ Mother House in Rome in 2011. Though it is not dated it appears to be about 1900 or so. And it seems that it is the northern side of the building with the photo being taken from Chester St. The southern side of this building is always shown as having a staircase going to a landing on the first floor and then onwards to the top floor.

### Early photo

The accompanying photo of children on the steps of the church is not very sharp in detail. The caption is in French and it is believed that it may date from the early 1900s.

The child with the dark clothing might be a boy wearing a “sailor suit”. This fashion for boys was common in the early twentieth century. The building in the background is the presbytery.





The discipline is good. Pupils are well-behaved and  
mannerly. They apply themselves diligently and  
Government honestly to their work.

Some classes have recently been amalgamated so  
Organization that pupils and subjects are somewhat mixed.  
The 4th classes may now be grouped for Rag. &  
Recitation.

Methods: Methods are good, and are applied with good  
energy. Lessons are well-prepared. Geog., History &  
Grammar especially are intelligently taught.

Proficiency and Progress of Pupils: A good standard of proficiency has  
been attained. Anth., Writ<sup>g</sup>, Composition, Geog., History,  
Mapping, Spell<sup>g</sup>, Draw<sup>g</sup> & Needlework, all give satisfactory  
results. The writ<sup>g</sup> of 1st IV is exceptionally good. Rec<sup>tn</sup> needs revising  
in all classes, and in the lower portion of the school more attention  
should be paid to expression and articulation. Rag. is very  
fair in 1st IV and 3rd, but only moderate in 4th classes. The  
comprehension of the Rag. Less. is fair. The boys are taught  
wood-carving while the girls are doing sewing. Some  
very good samples of work were noticed. School songs,  
• Cap<sup>y</sup> of Grounds: are well selected, and tunelessly rendered.  
It is to be regretted that Oly. Lessons and Nature Talks are  
not given. These quicken the perceptive faculties, and are  
an aid to oral and written Composition.

School Games and Physical Exercises: These are well taught by an instructor from  
the garrison. There is a good tennis court.

General Condition: Very satisfactory

GENERAL REMARKS: B H Kenna  
Dist. Insp.

### Lord Kitchener, Christmas Day, 1909

During a lightening tour of the countries of the Empire in 1909-10, Lord Kitchener was checking on the defence preparedness of the areas he visited. The reporter for *The Advertiser* (Adelaide)<sup>25</sup> took a rather cynical view of the visit. Referring to the visit to T.I. he wrote:

"[On Christmas Day, 1909] Lord Kitchener was at Thursday Island, and after the cheering multitude had allowed him to pass through the international and multi-hued crowd that thronged the jetty, he visited Milman's Hill Fort, had dinner, and re-embarked in H.M.S. Endeavour."



<sup>25</sup> Pp. 9-10.



However the same reporter made a remark that would be of interest to those who know their history. Writing in 1910 he commented: “*Wherever the next great war may occur in which Great and Greater Britain may be involved, Kitchener of Khartoum may possibly be the controlling authority in administrative and executive command.*”

(The accompanying facsimile of a wartime recruiting poster shows the image of Kitchener calling citizens to join the forces in 1914. A number of Torres Strait Islanders answered that call, but whether they ever saw the famous poster is a matter of conjecture.)

Some readers may query why Lord Kitchener may be considered to have a place in the history of a Catholic school. But this brush with fame, though presumably not understood by the children at the time, is a part of the rich tapestry of their young lives.



*Marching up Douglas Street past the first National Bank building. Picture taken from the Torres Hotel.*

The black-and-white photo is taken from Captain John Foley’s *Timeless Isle*<sup>26</sup>. Then in 2011, virtually 100 years later, the coloured photo was taken from, possibly, the same window.



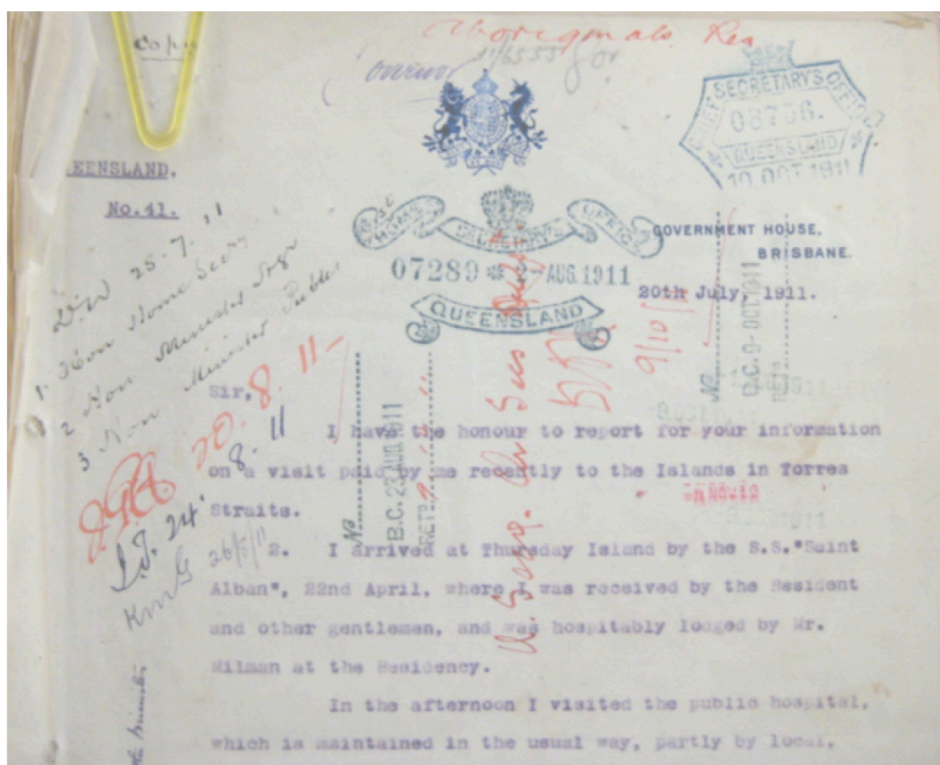
The Convent school is just out of the picture to the right. Consequently the children at the Hostel/Orphanage would have had a “ring-side seat” of the proceedings.

### Official Educational Report, 1911

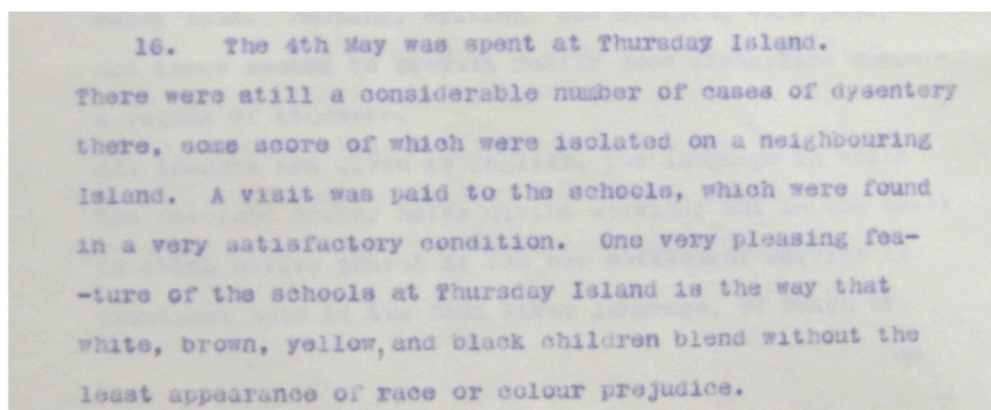
This letterhead of the Home Secretary’s Office of 1911 is typical of documents held in the State Archives of Queensland, with its rubber stamps and scribbled notes, where this document was found. It introduces a Report following a visit “*to the islands of the Torres Strait.*”

<sup>26</sup> Fourth Edition, Supplement, un-numbered pages.

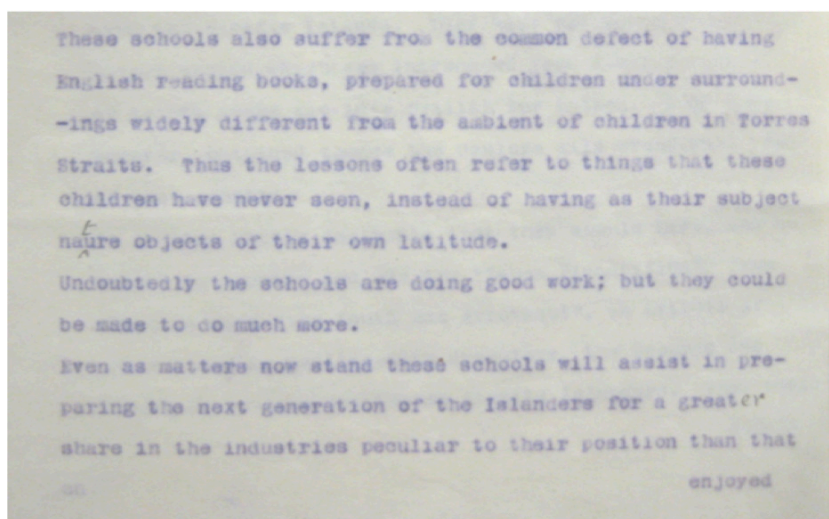




This Report comments favourably on the way all children mixed without any reference to race. This is a theme that we read time and again:



It's interesting to note the following observation regarding books. This is 1911. And this is a comment that will be heard a number of times in the future.



The Report is very modern for 1911 in its suggestion that the better students might be able to be trained as nurses etc.

*"It would be of great use to have some of the best educated young women from the several islands put through a course of training as nurses, say at the Thursday Island hospital. It might also be possible to send some of the most intelligent and best educated young men to Fiji as students, where many years ago I instituted a course for*

*native practitioners sufficient to enable them to deal with such diseases as dysentery, pneumonia, pleurisy, &c. A few young men put through such a course at Fiji, or if it is impracticable, at Thursday Island, could, I feel sure, do much to stem the loss of life from dysentery that is desolating the islands.*

### Three T.I. Primary Schools, 1913-1964

As early as 1906 the white parents of the schoolchildren attending the T.I. State Primary school were complaining that their children had to sit “cheek by jowl” with coloured children. There was talk of “degrading influences” – at least that was the expression used in an editorial in the *Torres Pilot* of May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1906.

Then a report in the *Pilot* of 19<sup>th</sup> May we read of a visit by the Queensland Premier to T.I. where a number of delegations were waiting to put their views to him:

*“The State School Committee asked that there should be a separation of white and full-blooded coloured children in connection with the attendance at the school; a matter which was before the Minister of Education, and to forward which his influence was requested.”*

The upshot of this was that in 1913 a separate school for coloured children was established under the control of the Protector of Aborigines, rather than the Education Department.

This arrangement of their being three primary schools on the tiny island of T.I. lasted till 1963.

## THE PILOT.

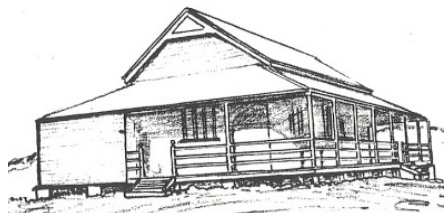
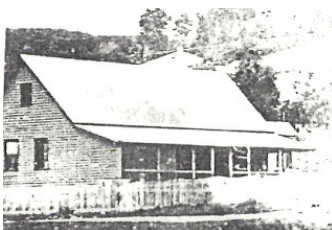
PUBLISHED WEEKLY.

SATURDAY, MAY 5, 1906.

### TO CORRESPONDENTS.

All communications to the Editor must be accompanied by the proper name of the author, which, however, does not preclude the use of a nom-de-plume. The columns of the “Pilot” are open to the discussion of topics of local interest, provided that fairness be a strict rule, and that it be understood that we accept no responsibility for the expressed opinion of correspondents.

We hear on the most reliable authority that a question which has caused a great deal of heart-burning in the past is about to receive some attention from the Education Department, for the subject of white children having to sit cheek by jowl with colored at the State School is being considered by the Minister. We hope the School Committee will take the matter up, and persevere in bringing it to a successful issue, as it is unquestionably necessary that the degrading influences surrounding the mixed character of the attendance at the school should be separated. It requires only a united



(The school to the left is the Convent school from a photo; the middle sketch is the State School and the one to the right is the School for Coloured Children. The sketches are by I.B. Wallace and are from the booklet “Old T.I.”<sup>27</sup>)

### Empire Day, 1908

A short report of the way T.I. “juveniles” were to celebrate Empire Day, 1908, is given in the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* of 29<sup>th</sup> May<sup>28</sup>: “... the assemblage of the T.I. juveniles at the Victoria Hall, where a guard of men from the R.A.A. were to be drawn up, and the ceremony of unfurling and saluting the flag of the British race inaugurated. ... In the afternoon there was to be sports of the juveniles on the reserve in front of the drill hall.”

<sup>27</sup> *Old T.I., a book of pencil sketches and historical notes*, Matthew Joseph O’Riley, I. B. Wallace. Publisher, M.J. O’Riley and I.B. Wallace, 1977.

<sup>28</sup> p.3.

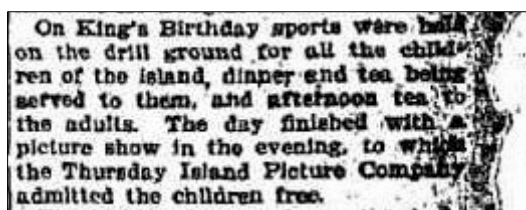


The reference to the “flag of the British race” has its irony when taking into account the mixture of numerous (non-British) races that made up the “juveniles” of T.I. at the time. Just the previous year<sup>29</sup> an observer noted the enormous range of “colour” amongst the children. *“The range of color is great – is wonderful – even to one who is acquainted with Port Darwin. Every person one meets seems to be of a different shade. There’s the fairest Saxon to be seen and the darkest Ethiopian, and all the shades between.”*

### Visit of Governor, 1909

A curious detail is noticed in a short press report in the short-lived *Cairns Morning Post*<sup>30</sup> in 1909 relating to a visit to T.I. by the Governor, Lord Chelmsford. Some entertainments were provided. The press report states: *“The Japanese gave an exhibition of wrestling, the aboriginals displayed themselves in a corroboree, while the juvenile whites held a fancy dress ball in honour of the visitor.”* It must be left to the imagination of the reader as to how the “whites only” fancy dress ball was arranged and whether the Sisters had anything to do with it. From the twenty-first century it seems most odd, but at the time it may have been most natural to all and sundry. It’s recorded here as a sign of the times.

### Entertainments before the War, June, 1914



Oblivious, naturally, that in two months the world would be at War, the adults and children of Thursday Island enjoyed various entertainments that are recorded in the *Northern Miner* of 14<sup>th</sup> June<sup>31</sup>. First of all there was Home Secretary, Mr.J.G. Appel’s, visit to the two schools, awarding them a holiday for the following Friday. And then on the occasion of the King’s Birthday there was a programme of sports on the Drill ground,

*“for all the children of the island, dinner and tea being served to them and afternoon tea to the adults. The day finished with a picture show in the evening, to which the Thursday Island Picture Company admitted the children free.”*

### The First World War, 1914-1918

Patriotically, as from many other, even tinier, towns throughout Australia than T.I., men answered the call to enlist at the time of the First World War, beginning in 1914. The following poster, put up around Thursday Island in August, 1914, was photographed in the Heritage Museum at Green Hill Fort on Thursday Island. In another place<sup>32</sup> we learn that former students from Sacred Heart School enlisted and it is hoped to research their story. Mentioned there are **Mr. W. Turnbull Snr.** and **H. Elarde**.



Captain Foley<sup>33</sup> gives just one paragraph on T.I. during the First World War:

*“In 1914, the Great War demonstrated yet again the strategic importance of this island. Military forces spread over the area in large numbers, setting up observation posts and fortifications. Torres Strait came under continuous and intense surveillance in order to deny passage to enemy vessels. Volunteers to fight for the Allied cause came from all over the Strait and many lost their lives on the battlefields of Europe, so far away.”*

A fruitful area of research would be to find which T.I. soldiers in World War I had connections with Sacred Heart School; parents and other former students. The War was most surely on the minds of the Sisters and children, given the inquisitive nature of children asking questions about anything they see that they don’t understand. We could well imagine: *“Sister, why are those men wearing those brown-coloured clothes?”*, *“Sister, why are all those men walking all together at the same time?”*, *“Sister, where have all those big grey boats come from?”* And children would have had stories about their fathers: *“My dad’s going to the War!”*,

<sup>29</sup> *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1907 p.7.

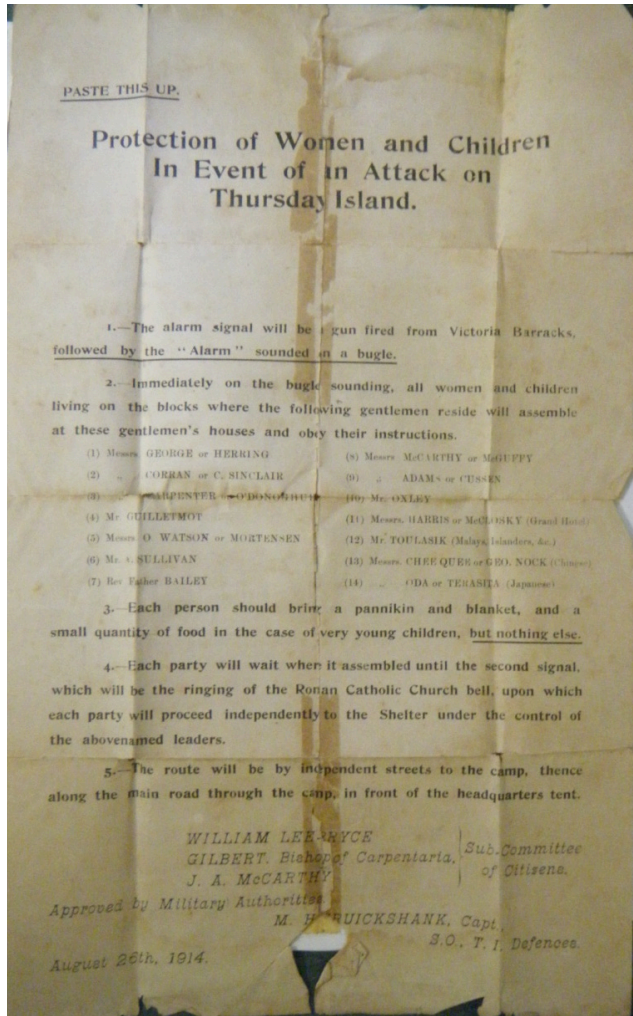
<sup>30</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> April, p.5.

<sup>31</sup> P.3.

<sup>32</sup> *Torres News*, April 30, 1957.

<sup>33</sup> *Timeless Isle*, p.61.

and “*My dad is joining the army and is going to defend T.I.!*” And it would not be fanciful to believe that there were often prayers said for the troops and maybe collections of tinned food etc. sent to the soldiers in Europe. And then, as mentioned when relating Red Cross Day, 1918, there could well have been men returning injured to be cared for in the hospital; and news such as that would have quickly circulated through the island.



Rev. Father Bailey, mentioned in No.2 (7) in the poster (pictured), was the local Catholic Parish Priest at the time (1914). Notice, too, the reference to a small quantity of food “*in the case of very young children*” and the role of “*the Roman Catholic Church bell*” in the proceedings.

### Another Education Report, 1916

The Home Secretary, Mr. Huxham, visited Thursday Island in June, 1916. A report of his tour is found in *The Brisbane Courier* of 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1916<sup>34</sup>. It contains some interesting observations on the ability of the children visited.

“*At Thursday Island Mr. Huxham inspected the hospital, the State and Convent schools, and the aboriginal school. The Home Secretary stated that he was going to try to have money made available for the improvement of the mission settlements. ‘I am also going to try to get the Federal Government interested in the natives as an [illegible] said Mr. Huxham. ‘As seamen you cannot beat the natives. They are remarkably clever sailors. I shall prepare a minute when I return to Brisbane, and have it sent to the Federal Government with a view to inducing it when dealing with the question of Northern defence to utilize natives to the best advantage. The children are remarkably intelligent. I saw work there that would have been a credit to any white school children, and their teachers. You could scarcely*

*distinguish the writing of the natives from the copy which was put in front of them. Their arithmetic was good, both mental and otherwise. It has been said that the natives have no memory, but the same applies to anybody who does not exercise his mind. From what I have seen I am satisfied that one of these days Secondary Education would have to be a factor so far as the natives are concerned.*”

This “one of these days” that Secondary Education might be a factor on the Island was to take exactly 50 years.

### Illness, 1916, 1920

Measles struck during 1916. In the Report of the Government Resident of 1917, reporting on 1916, we read:

“*Schools – the several reports by the Government teachers are all favourable, and the attendance of the children has been regular except during the epidemic of measles, when the schools had to be closed to prevent infection.*”



<sup>34</sup> P.6.



One can only imagine the panic at the Orphanage with the children sleeping in a dormitory. Presumably the Sisters isolated any children affected. The obscured figure of the number of sick on the Island is 60%.

(The facsimiles concerning influenza are from the *Brisbane Courier*, 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1920 and *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1920.)

## Red Cross Day, 1918

“RED CROSS DAY AT THURSDAY ISLAND” is a heading in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* of 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1918, and the article contains some interesting matters. Quite possibly the money collected would be for the care of returned servicemen as a number of residents of Thursday Island had enlisted for the First World War and would soon be returning if they had not already done so.



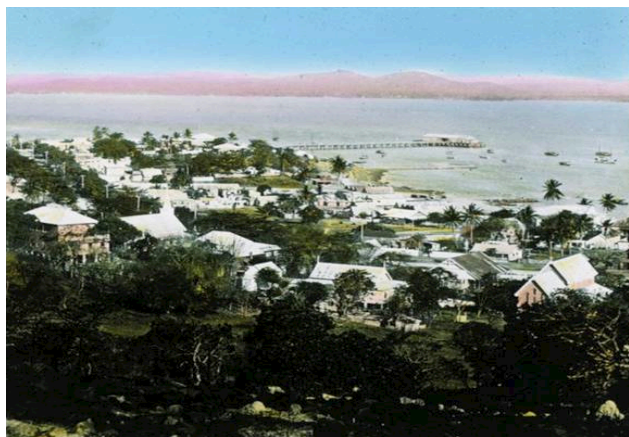
**INFLUENZA.**  
**THURSDAY ISLAND OUTBREAK.**  
THURSDAY ISLAND, February 10.  
The influenza epidemic is assuming a more serious form. Nine deaths have been recorded, amongst the victims being Mr. George Byres (a long resident, and recently Government carpenter) and Chief Petty Officer Green, of the local Naval Department. It is estimated that 60 per cent. of the people are suffering. The General Hospital is overcrowded, while a temporary hospital for the military has been established. There is a serious shortage of medicines, and the hospital staff is quite inadequate. The medical superintendent (Dr. Markwell) and Nurse Herring are also ill; the latter developed influenza yesterday. It is understood that the military authorities have been requested to send doctors, nurses, medicines, and milk by a destroyer to meet the urgent necessities.

While the children would have enjoyed the “Paddy’s Market” arrangement of the day, they would have had a particular interest in “Rev. Mother’s cloth”. The following extract will reveal all:

*“Special thanks are due to Mrs Brett who contributed a unique autograph table cloth which was a work of art and reflected great credit to her. ... The lace table cloth worked and decorated by the Reverend Mother, was also a handsome article, and netted thirteen pounds and two shillings. It may be considered hard to thank one person more than another, but nevertheless the assistance given in kind by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart Convent and School, the Mapoon Mission Girls, St. Paul’s Mission, was most noted.”*

TO THE HONOR AND GLORY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE  
THURSDAY ISLAND GARRISON  
AND CITIZENS OF THURSDAY ISLAND  
WHO SERVED IN THE GREAT WAR OF 1914-1919  
AND IN EVERLASTING REMEMBRANCE OF AND GRATITUDE  
TO THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES THAT YOU MIGHT BE FREE

These memorials, long housed in the old T.I. Town Hall, are now displayed in the foyer of the Torres Shire Building in Douglas Street which replaced that building, and they keep alive the names of those who served in the Great War.



(This photo of the town is from those posted on the net by the National Library of Australia. However as displayed on the net the photo is back-to-front. The image displayed here is correct. Note the tan building in the centre, left. It is the Orphanage. This photo seems to be about the 1920s.)

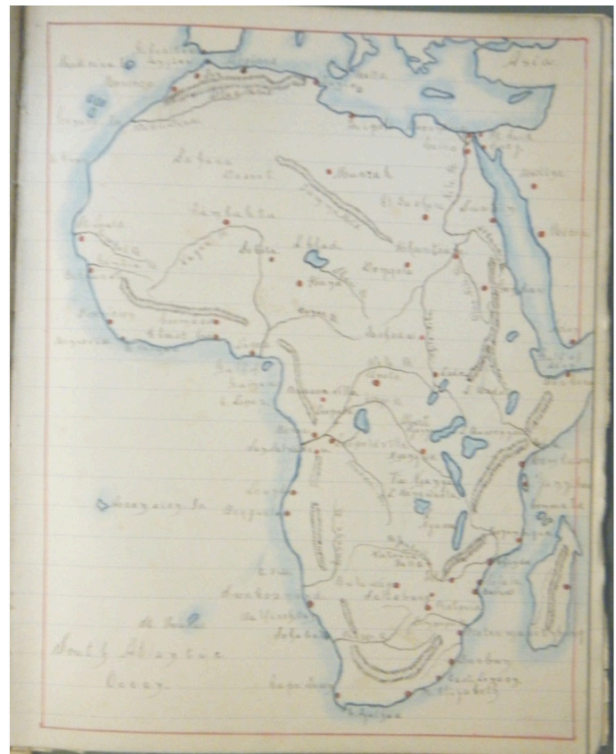
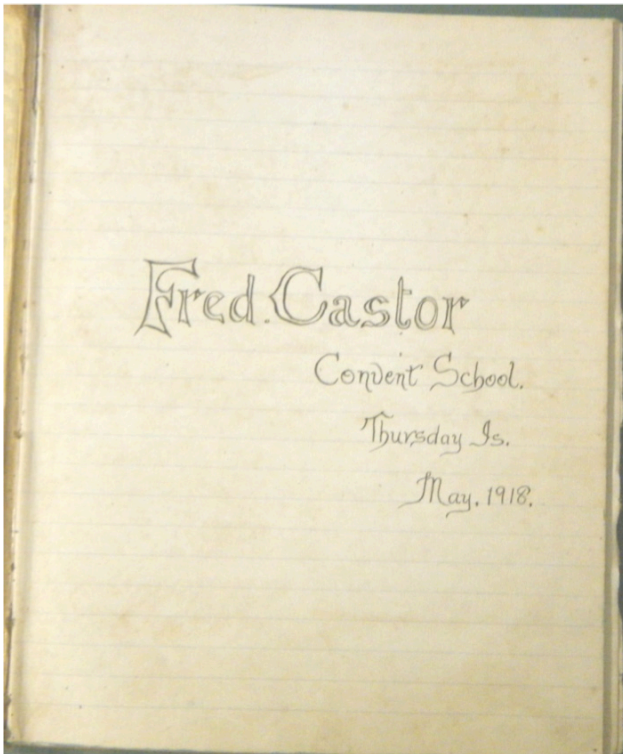


It would have been a T.I. similar to that in the accompanying photo that the returning troops would have seen on their return.

### Glimpse of school life, 1918

Apart from the normal comments on how well various subjects are taught in various grades it is interesting to note in the Inspector's Report of 1918<sup>35</sup>, "*There is no corporal punishment.*"

Singing in parts is commended, and unlike some previous reports there is further commendation that "*a fair course of lessons in Nature Study is arranged.*" Under GENERAL REMARKS we read: "*(1) There is no school Library. (2) Much active interest is taken in Red-Cross work. (3) Very little home-work is prescribed: Written exercises are good.*"



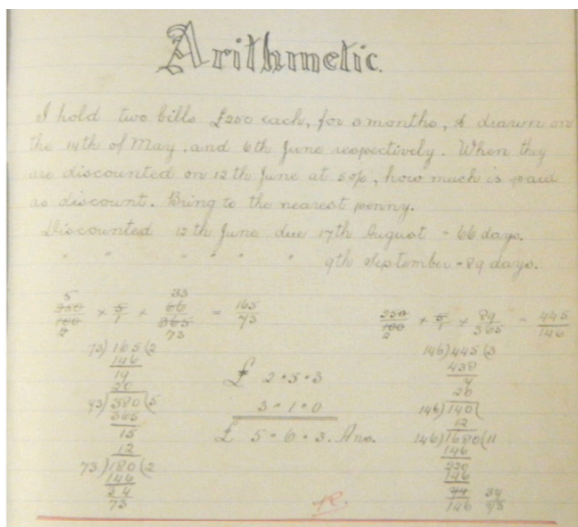
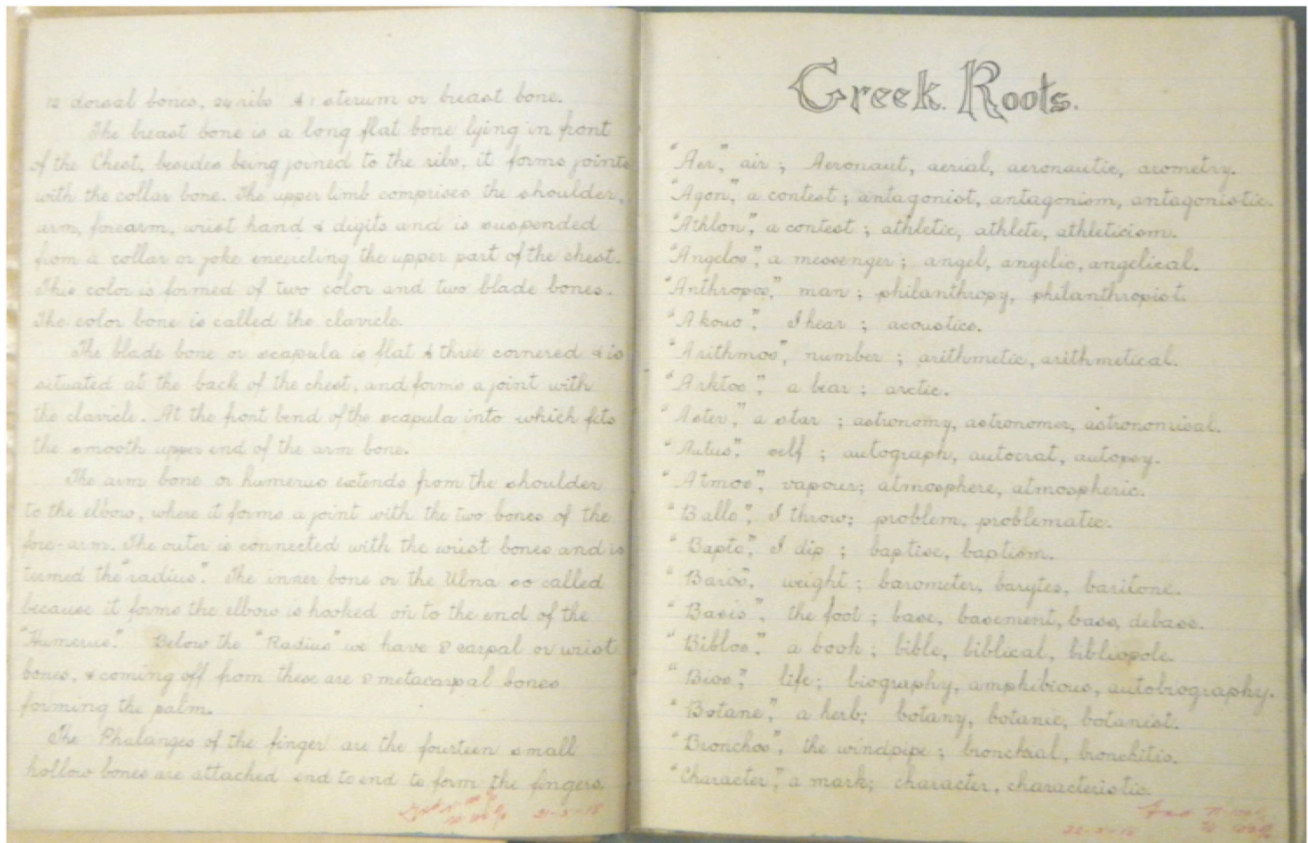
The accompanying beautiful extracts are from Fred Castor's Exercise book of May 1918. It was presented to the Thursday Island Historical Society and is housed in their Green Hill Fort Museum. The reader can see why the Inspector of that year remarked that, "*Written exercises are good.*" (The map of Africa is hand-drawn and coloured.)

The book contains Nature Studies, Civics, with an essay on the Australian flag, lists of Latin Roots as well as the Greek Roots reproduced below, a beautiful map of the entire Pacific and the surrounding rim of land masses, Parsing and Analysis and English exercises, Mathematics problems similar to those reproduced below.

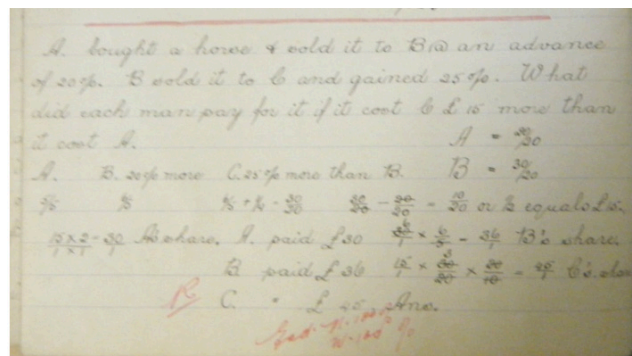
And what a minor miracle that such a sample of schoolwork has been kept for more than 90 years.

<sup>35</sup> Inspector Denniss, 14th October, 1918.





Readers from the early twenty-first century are rightly surprised by the quality and sophistication of the work done by children in 1918, comparing it with what eleven and twelve year-olds are asked to do in the second decade of the twenty-first century.



Note that Sister has conscientiously "corrected" these exercises and given a mark, and signed in red.

This photo of two Sisters with children, presumed to be the entire school population, was supplied by the Rome Archives of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and was said to be 1920.



### Some students, 1901-1920

The following names are taken from the Register for the Orphanage and so do not include the day children. The names of the day children may have been lost.

	born	“received”	“dismissed”
Antonia Bouillio	Horn Island	April 1901	Here 2 yrs Mch 1903
Maria de Mercedes Bouillio	Horn Island	April 1901	Here 2 yrs
Agnes Gallora	Horn Island	Nov 1901	Jan 1909
Scholastica Canendo		Feb 1902	Jan 1909
Maria Theresa Assacruz		Mar 1903	Nov 1916
Victoriana Assacruz		Oct 1903	Married Aug 1914
Petronella Santo	Walton Land bank	Oct 1903	Dead
Francisca Geronimo	Moa Island	Oct 1903	Went to NG June 1906
Maria Teresa Raymond Ramos	Mar 1904		
Marcella Pascuale	Darnby Island	Sept 1904	May 1917 readmit. Feb 1919 Readmitted Aug 1918
Maria Anna Manantan	Wednesday Island	Nov 1904	Oct 1920
Kateleen Pasquale	Horn Island	Jan 1906	May 1920
Maria Pavian (called Sylvia)	Horn Isl.	Mar 1906	deceased
Johanna Sohado	Aureed Isl.	April 1906	1908
(Leonora) Magdalena	Assacruz Horn Isl.	Jan 1907	July 1917
Gregoria Assacruz	Horn Isl.	Jan 1907	Oct 1920
Angelina Pasquale	Horn Island	Sept 1909	Dec 1920
Theodora Palancio	Thursday island	Oct 1910	Aug 1918
Maria Blanco	Thursday island	Oct 1911	Dec 1922
Celestina Blanco	Thursday Island	Nov 1911	1929
Cyriaca Macbire	Thursday is		1929
Juliana Macbire	Thursday Is		Left for New G. Jan 1929
Maria Monmarile	Thursday Is	Aug 1914	
Maria Macbire	Horn Island	Aug 1915	Went to work for Mrs Priors Feb 1937 Left 1938 Readmitted Nov 1939
Anaclea Cadanas	Yam Island	Dec 1915	Feb 1923

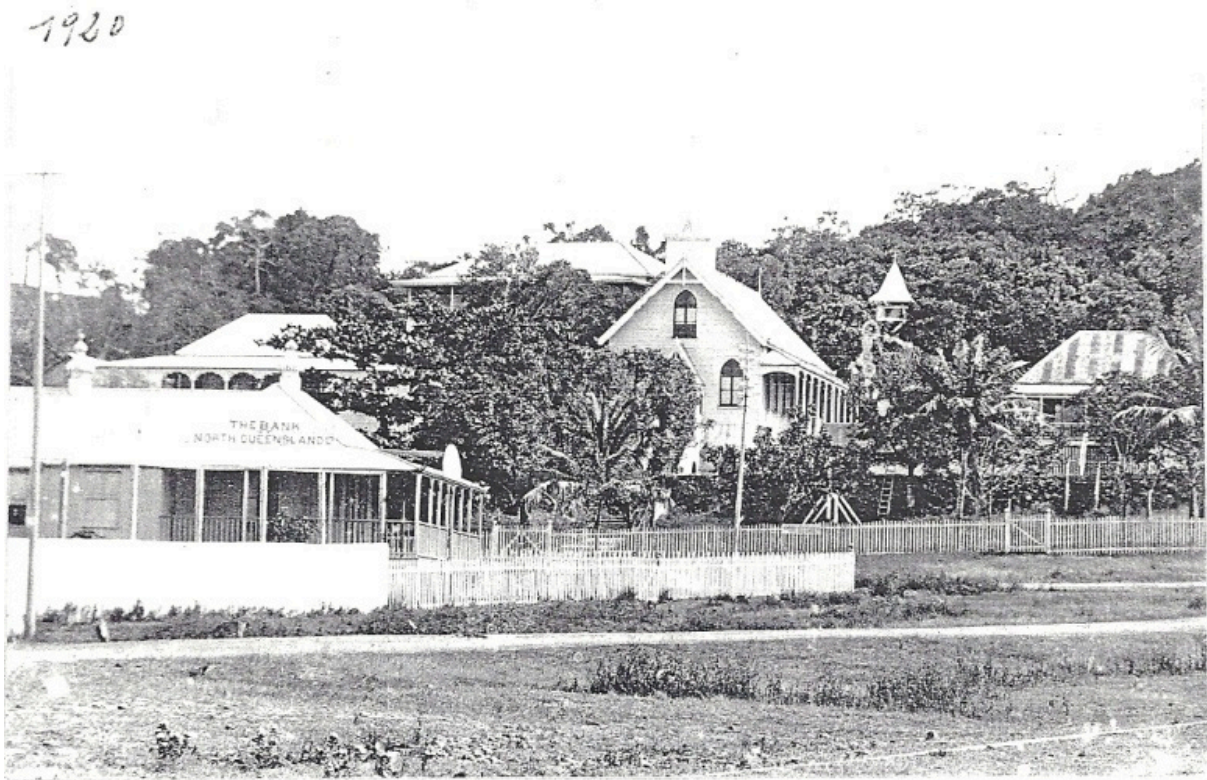


Victoriana Canando b. 1898	Horn Is	Oct 1915	1916
(and baby Alphonsus Canando born 4 June 1915) Thursday Is.			
Anna de la Cruz	Thursday is.	Jan 1914	Nov 1920
Victorine de la Cruz	Thursday Is.	Jan 1914	May 1920
Isabel de la Cruz	Thursday is.	Jan 1916	June 1921
John (Lopez) de la Cruz	Thursday Is.	Jan 1916	April 1916
Sleeps at the Presbytery; Board at Convent Orphanage			
Philomeno de la Cruz	Thursday Is	Jan 1916	April 1916
Sleeps at the Presbytery			
Isabella Llorans	Thursday Is.	Feb 1916	Sept 1919
Mary Garnier	Coconut Is.	Mch 1916	Left for N.G. Jan 1929
Maria (May) Macbire	Horn Is.	Aug 1915	Oct 1938
Laura Dorante	Nepean Is.	Ap.1916	Dec 1916
Celesstina Lancastre	Horn Is.		Aug 1916
Ambrosia (Bullis)	Thursday Is.	Jan 1916	1918
Edith Nicholls	Mulgrave Cairns	May 1916	Left for N.G. Jan 1929
Mary Nicholls	Pt. Moresby		May 1916
Gracie Nicholls	Orismo River Daru	May 1916	
Josephine Caduans	Th. Island	Nov 1916	Feb 1923
Mary Dubbins	Th. Island	Feb 1919	1939
Dorothy Moyden	Th. Island	Sep 1919	Went to work Oct 1937
Martha Hodges	Th. Is.	Sept 1921	Left for N.G. Jan 1929
Petronilla Sabatino	Yam Is.		Feb 1923
JessieMoydeno(?)	Thursday Is	Aug 1920	May 1930
The next child admitted was in April, 1924.			

It's quite clear from the above that in these two decade, 1901-1920, the Orphanage was for girls only. The two de la Cruz boys, who joined in 1916 and stayed only for four months, were accommodated for sleeping at the Presbytery, but clearly had meals and all other activities with the other boarders.

The careful reader will have noticed, also, that a 17 year old girl in 1916 brought along her four-months-old baby boy. The two stayed for six months.

A further observation is that there were no admissions between January 1916 and August, 1920; a gap of three and a half years. There was a gap, too, between August 1920 and April, 1924; almost 4 years.



This photo, sent by the MSC Rome Archives, clearly shows the church, and to the right of it the bell tower and the presbytery. On the left with the arches is the Sisters' convent and between the convent and the church and a little higher up the hill is the "Orphanage".





## CHAPTER 8

### Thursday Island, 1914 to the 1920s

#### Not so pleasant descriptions

Earlier records of Thursday Island being beautiful, exotic and adventurous appear to give way to much more gloomy depictions of the island after the First World War.

A very short stay in 1914 did not leave a good impression on one traveller. M. McMillan<sup>1</sup>, after enjoying the beauty of the sea and islands neighbouring Thursday Island, had this to say about the island itself:

*“To this island might be applied the quotation ‘Distance lends enchantment to the view,’ as from the steamer it looked a most charming place, just the kind of island described in boys’ books of adventure in the South Seas. ... Alas for expectations! The reality was a woeful disappointment.*

*“On either side [of the main street] were plain-looking, little wooden houses, some of them shops ... The trees were few and far between, and useless as a protection from the sun; they seemed to know this, and had a listless and dispirited air ...”*



And he concluded his short recall of Thursday Island with the remark: *“We were only a few hours on T.I., and left it without regret ...”*

(Photo from the National Library of Australia, from the net, is dated 1920)

The following is a 1915 example<sup>2</sup>. The introduction to this passage is a description of the arrival of a supply ship at Port Kennedy:

*“An ample, rosy woman [maybe Maggie McNulty], the landlady asked, ‘As the beer come?’ she panted. “It was a swift exposition of the dreary pleasures of T.I. – and of the infinitely more dreary lack of them. And here, too, was a dreary hotel ... The town lay up from the waterside, wilting in the sun: a broad street, with a scorched boulevard of grassy sand and a row of dead young trees; dusty shops kept by Japanese and Chinamen; sleepy cottages overgrown with flowering tropical vines; buzzing native quarters; iron shanties, crowded close, at haphazard ... Life was alistless, sordid procession of hours, ticked off too slowly.”*

But even more condemnatory was the description of T.I. as, *“that dreary, broiling exile.”*<sup>3</sup>

Another unflattering description is given by Ralph Stock who was sailing around the world and remarked on *“the corrugated-iron and goat infested landscape of Thursday Island.”*<sup>4</sup>

The famous Australian photographer and cinematographer, Frank Hurley, visited T.I. and the Torres Strait in 1920-21. In his diary in 1920, he describes Thursday Island as, *“A collection of galvanized iron shanties hideous and ugly ...”*<sup>5</sup> He was most interested in finding Islander people in their “primitive” and “natural” state, but was disappointed at what he found on Thursday Island in 1920. *“While he found worthwhile photographic subjects in the pearling and beche de mer fishing industries, the islanders themselves [on T.I.] were so thoroughly missionised that he despaired of obtaining good photographs of traditional life.”*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McMillan, M., *A journey to Java*, Hodder & Hardingham, Adelphi, London, 1914, pp. 53-54.

<sup>2</sup> Duncan, Norman, *Australian byways: the narrative of a sentimental traveller*, Harpur & Brothers, NY, London, 1915, p.277.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.278.

<sup>4</sup> Stock, Ralph, *The Cruise of the Dream Ship*, William Heinemann, London, 1921/2, p.246.

<sup>5</sup> Sprecht, J. And Fields, J., *Frank Hurley in Papua*, Robert Brown and Associates, Bathurst, 1984, P.4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.4.



## A happier view

The local doctor would have a good insight into life in a community. When he had finished his time on Thursday Island, Doctor Vernon penned a sort of Farewell<sup>7</sup> that he had published by Alexander Corran, the newspaper printer on T.I. He would have been referring to the 1920s as the pamphlet is believed to have been published in 1930. He writes:

*“The town is prettily planted with various flowering shrubs. The spreading almond trees make lovely shady avenues, and poncianas in their flowering season form vivid patches of scarlet among the roofs of houses. White scented frangapini abounds everywhere.”*

*“There are about two hundred luggers in commission just now and when they all lie at anchor in the lee of the north-west off the beach they form a beautiful picture. At such times the alien population of the island becomes greatly augmented. The Japanese boarding houses are filled to overflowing. The New Guinea house is packed at night with its complement of dark skinned, mysterious, Stone Age exiles. Up and down the streets all nationalities swagger, crowding to the picture show and filling the many tiny stores which line the main street.*

*“When the boats leave the streets become quieter and the coloured shopkeepers doze and smoke unmolested amid their modest array of cheap jack trade goods. The Oriental shopkeeper here has only to purchase two bunches of bananas, a few sweets and cigarettes, and he has a shop – a mushroom come to life in a day.”<sup>8</sup>*



(Photo from C.M. Yonge, *A Year on the Great Barrier Reef*, Plate XLVII, and is titled, “Main Street at Thursday Island.”)

## Occasional violence

*“Several cases of murder and suicide occurred among the divers while I was here; all sprang from the same cause followed the same course. A man would come back from the pearling grounds to find his girl no longer loved him; he would then shoot her and anyone in his path, and flee, pursued by the police and friends of the murdered, and when murder became inevitable, shoot himself.”<sup>9</sup>*

## Picture of the people, 1923

A colourful picture of the dress and appearance of the people of T.I. in 1923 is given in Jack McLaren’s “My Odyssey”<sup>10</sup>:

*“And variety of tongues is equaled by variety of costumes. There are Japanese women in clattering sandals and flowered kimonos with back-bows so great that they look like old-time bustles; barefooted Malays in loose-wound sarongs; Kanakas in sleeveless shirts and dungaree trousers cut off at the knees; Papuans in skimpy*

<sup>7</sup> Vernon, *From Torres Straits*, Alexander Corran, Thursday Island, c.1930, p.10. (Copy in the State Library of NSW.)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Powell, Sydney Walter, *Adventures of a wanderer*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1928, p.102.

<sup>10</sup> McLaren, J. *My Odyssey*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1923, p.155-6.

*loin-cloths; Europeans in white starched suits; Australian Aborigines, pathetic in cast-off oddments, some in trousers only, some in shirt and nothing else."*

The "open-air cinematograph show" was described in detail with the observation that if a downpour came the patrons merely put up umbrellas and continued watching. The movies were all silent in 1923 and some of the patrons believed that the words of dialogue that flashed on the screen only held up the action.



### Vivid word picture of T.I. in 1929

The following passages bring alive aspects of life as observed on T.I. in 1929. The article from the *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton) does not have a by-line, but has the heading and sub heading of "THURSDAY ISLAND: AN OUTPOST OF EMPIRE"<sup>11</sup>

*"The town is divided into two parts – the business portion, with its six hotels, stores (mostly run by Chinese), jeweller's shops, banks, warehouses, and an open-air picture theatre; and the native quarter "Yokohama", a sandy wilderness of unmade streets, tin shanties, Japanese stores, and gambling dens. There are two churches, the Quetta Memorial Church (the cathedral of the Bishopric of Carpenteria) and the Roman Catholic Church. There are two schools, one for the white children, and one for the natives. ...*

*The most important industry in "T.I." is the pearling, which is practically in the hands of the Japanese, who are the only people that will engage in the deep-sea diving, for a diver's period of active life, strenuous and unpleasant, and hazardous in the extreme, averages only three years. One morning at daybreak, the harbor, which overnight had been silent and empty, showed a forest of brown-stemmed masts. The pearling fleet had come home seventeen days before its time. For it was the Mikado's birthday – the biggest day of the year for "T.I." – and not an owner nor a master dared board his vessel and order the crew back to duty. The fleet lay at anchor<sup>5</sup>, scores and scores of two-masted luggers, heads up to the wind, with canvas sails folded, resting serenely like a flock of white gulls. Ever since daylight the dinghy of each lugger had been plying over the short stretch of water to the beach, filled to the gunwale with pearlshell, each load holding half a ton. Their black, brown and dusky white crews, laden with large boxes, carried on two poles, sedan-chair fashion, moved up the beach and across the road to the warehouses, where the shell is examined and weighed. There is the constant chatter and banter, and a babel of tongues amongst these men of the fleet, and they are all physically perfect. Three months at sea weeds out the weak and unfit. These motley crews dress as they please. The Papuans and South Sea Islanders favour the Malay sarong or lava lava (a strip of white, red, blue, or figured cloth tied round the waist and falling to the knees). Most of the others wear a pair of trousers and a shirt. Some of the Papuans bleach the top of their fuzzy heads with lime, and then run in a red vegetable stain. These are the exquisites of the fleet. All go barefooted and most bare-headed, and as they work call and shout with many gesticulations, making the scene an animated one. After every meal a group of black-skinned Papuans come out of an eating-house along the sea front. They cross the beach to the water carrying kerosene tins and other cooking utensils, and wash the lot in the sea. This completed, they wade in waist deep and wash their one-piece garment before venturing upon a swim. As they return with their household goods and penates, the strong tropical sunlight, flashing from their wet, glistening skins, shows to advantage their magnificent chests and limbs. Life for them is reduced to its simplest elements.*

<sup>11</sup> *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 14<sup>th</sup> February, p.6.



*The wives and children of the crews of the luggers are glad to have them back, and this morning the town is gayer than usual, with everywhere the flags of England and Japan fluttering in the wind, and the sound of the accordion and gramophone comes fitfully. But the predominant note is one of colour. Upon the cobalt sea a cutter's dinghy approaches the shore. Painted white without and red within, and filled with shining shell, it is pulled by a bare-headed brown Japanese in blue trousers and a lemon-yellow sweater. A black-skinned Papuan, wearing a lava lava, squats native fashion upon the shell, and the colours do not clash because of the setting."*

The following extract is from the *Barrier Miner*, 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1920, p.4:

## **LIFE AT THURSDAY ISLAND**

### **AN ERA OF PROSPERITY IN SOME OF THE INDUSTRIES**

#### **A MIXED POPULATION**

Remarkable prosperity is being experienced in some of the chief industries of Thursday Island, Queensland's most northern outpost. Trochus shell, which is exported to Japan, is worth over £100 a ton, while it was once sold for £30 or £40. It is one of the mainstays of the large fleet of pearling luggers, of which Thursday Island is the headquarters, and there is a danger that the high price may lead to the reefs being ruthlessly stripped. The choicest variety of trepang, much sought after by the Chinese for making soup, is now worth from £600 to £700 a ton, which is several times its price of a few years ago. Good returns are also coming in from pearls and pearlshell, and a high price rules for sandalwood (which is obtained on Cape York Peninsula, and shipped from Thursday Island (says the Thursday Island correspondent of the "Argus").

On the whole, the marvellously mixed population of Thursday Island is fairly peaceful and orderly, but at times there is trouble between the Japanese and the Papuans employed on the pearling fleet. Recently, after some quarrelling, 60 Papuans danced the war dance outside the town, and threatened to attack the Japanese. However, the fight did not happen, and last week, to avoid further trouble, 150 Papuans were sent home to Daru. Some of them propose to ask the Government of Papua whether it will protect them against the Japanese, some of whom have, so they allege, threatened to use firearms against the Papuans. The control of the pearling fleet is falling more and more into the hands of the Japanese, who have largely replaced the Malays, Manilamen, Cingalese, and South Sea Islanders, who once did much of the diving and other skilled work. Representatives of these and a dozen other races, as well as Papuans and Australian aborigines, still find employment at Thursday Island in various ways, but the Japanese hold a dominating position.

Since December 23 many of the inhabitants of Thursday Island have not

habitants of Thursday Island have not tasted fresh meat, unless they have been lucky enough to get a turtle steak, gugong, or other delicacies of that kind. The little meat available has been used to supply the military garrison three days a week, while the civilian population has lived on tinned meat (when it could be got) and tinned fish. Owing to the shipping difficulty there has been a shortage of other commodities, but not to the same extent. The Mayor (Councillor Corran) has several times made representations on the subject to the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments. All the comfort he has received has been a promise from the Controller of Shipping that space will be reserved for Thursday Island on the s.s. Changsha, but that owing to the engineers' strike the movements of that vessel are uncertain. If the strike continues the island, like Darwin and other northern ports, will be very short of many necessary commodities, but Darwin will at least have beef available.

On the island there is something like a financial crisis. Most of the pearling vessels are in port, and so great was the call for money to pay the wages of the divers and crews that it absorbed nearly all the cash of the two banks. It is said that over £25,000 was drawn in a few days, mainly by the Japanese; and the gambling at Yokohama, as the Japanese quarter of the island is called, has been on a tremendous scale. At present Thursday Island has a population of 2000 or 2700, of whom 1400 are at other times afloat in the pearling fleet. Of these 580 are white, including men, women and children. There are 600 or 700 indentured, Japanese divers, and seamen, and the others belong to a score of colored races. Even the Papuans working in the pearling fleet have felt the influence of modern industrial ideas. Recently they threatened to strike for overtime pay on Sundays and they were granted 2/6 a day. The Japanese also understand the strike weapon, and the divers talk of demanding an extra £10 a ton, making £35 for all the shell raised. They receive besides all the pearls and a monthly wage sometimes as high as £50. Cases are quoted in which a diver has made £1250 in four months from pearls alone, but these are exceptions, though the rewards are high.

The clipping to the right was photographed in the T.I. Green Hill Fort Museum. The faded pencil note indicates *Sydney Mail*, August 10th, 1927. The main caption is "H.M.A.S. SYDNEY ENTERING PORT KENNEDY THURSDAY ISLAND". And though blurry it is interesting to note the cow and the well.

### Thursday Island Jubilee, 1927

1927 marks Thursday Island's 50<sup>th</sup> Brithday and there were celebrations aplenty. In 1957 the following recollection of the celebrations appeared in the *Torres News* of 10<sup>th</sup> September. Photos of the celebrations can be found in Captain Foley's *Timeless Isle*, p.62, and are reproduced in the following chapter.



THURSDAY 10th SEPTEMBER 1957    TORRES NEWS    PAGE 5

THURSDAY ISLANDS GOLDEN JULIBEE. 1927.

Fifty years ago Mr. H.M. Chester, then police magistrate at Somerset, transferred under Government instructions the seat of Administration in Torres Strait from Somerset to Thursday Island and the Jubilee of that occurrence was celebrated on Saturday 17th Sept. with the greatest enthusiasm by the residents, with many visitors white and coloured from the surrounding Islands and the mainland.

The Jubilee on Saturday first took the form of a procession, (headed by the Town Band) which had been splendidly organised and included illustrative pageants by representatives of all organisations and societies on the Island. It was attended by representatives of foreign nationalities, but the chief feature was a surprising body of native Rovers and Boy Scouts from Badu, who turned out in such splendid military fashion in native uniform dress, and in the course of the afternoon gave a most spirited native battle scene, revealing the great enthusiasm created amongst them by Scoutmaster Windsor of Badu. Native from other Islands and also from the mainland made a splendid display, the whole being a tribute to the good work of the Aboriginal Dept. and particularly to the credit of the local protector Mr. C. O'Leary.

The procession halted near the sports ground, at the edge of the harbour and there witnessed a pageant commemorative of the landing of Mr. H.M. Chester at about the same spot fifty years previously. Mr. G.H. Clarke personating the first magistrate, thence led by the landing party, the procession continued to the Court House, the original building, from the verandah of which the Mayor addressed an assembly of about 1200 persons before they dispersed for the sports.

Amongst the judges for the best decorated cars, best decorated bicycle, and the worst turnout was Mr. A.T. Sullivan. Collis Bakery received the prize for the Car, (Wedding Cake) Tino Mayor for the bicycle, and Mr. Frank Joyce for the worst turnout. A special prize was awarded to Mr. G. Joyce who was made up as an old time prospector, and J. George Estate for their bicycle. There was a fine Tableau of Britannia carried out by the C.W.A. and the Bluebird decoration seen in Mrs. J.L. Adams car was a most artistic display.

The proceedings were marked by no accidents, but early in the morning, Mrs. Dredge senior, slipped on the steps of her home and broke her wrist. Another incident of the day was the sinking of the lighter loaded with trochus shell on the shore reef between the West Jetty and the baths.

The presence of a detachment of men from His Majesty's ship "Platypus" in the procession was precluded because of the discovery of a case of scarlet fever aboard and the ships company were further greatly disappointed in the matter of a dance which had been arranged for Saturday evening. The sick man was removed to the Quarantine station.

Doctor Thompson subsequently stated, the procession was well worth travelling around the world to witness. It is regretful that no cinema could be arranged for to take pictures, though numerous cameras were in evidence.

On the Thursday previous a meeting of the local branch of the Geographical Society of Qld. was held amongst those present were the Mayor (Ald. A. Corran) President of the branch, A. Broadbent Esq. and Doctor J.P. Thompson, Qld. general secretary of the society.

.....





## CHAPTER 9

### Glimpses of the School, 1921-1928

In 1921 the population of the school was 75, the largest up to this date. The oval portrait photo is of Sister Ursula Maxwell who may have had a hand in the exam successes fittingly remembered in the following pages. (But it's not known which, if any of them, were from the Convent school!)



### Scholarships, 1921 and 1923

#### Scholarship Examination,

1921

	Name.	School.	Centre.
1342	Chandler, Harold Frederick ✓	Texas	Texas
1343	Bartlett, John David Campbell	Thursday Is.	Thursday Is.
1344	Collis, Albert		
1345	Fergusson, Robert ✓		
1346	Pope, Leslie Raymond ✓		
1347	Tanaka, Jimmy <i>Junichi</i> ✓		
1348	Vidgen, Frank Grahame ✓		
1349	Allen, Stanley Somerset ✓	Est	Toogoolawah

As can be seen by this list in 1921, there were several students from Thursday Island who gained Scholarships. Once again it is now known which attended the Convent school and who the State school. But whichever school the candidates attended, it is wonderful to see. And several also, for 1923.

#### Scholarship Examination

No.	Name.	School.	Centre.
3001	Newlands, Helen Margaret	Thulimbah	Stanthorpe
3002	Taggart, Jean Doris	Wallangarra	
3003	Day, Margaret <i>Margorie</i>	St. Joseph's R.C.	
3004	Mohamed, Monica <i>Bebe Miriam</i>		
3005	Princk, Thelma Daphney	St. George	St. George
3006	Bennett, Madge Sarah		
3007	Garr, Armie Patricia		
3008	Baston, Sylvia		
3009	Roberts, Ruth		
3010	Clark, Edith Cooper,	Surat	Surat
3011	Adam, Elsie Ena	Taroom	Taroom
3012	Adams, Olga Lenore		
3013	Kehl, Julia May		
3014	Kydd, Nellie May	Texas	Texas
3015	Welsby, Evelyn Winifred		
3016	Cameron, Annabel May	Thursday Island	Thursday Island
3017	Draffin, Dulcie Blanche		
3018	Lai Foo, <i>Ellen</i> <del>Nellie</del> Louisa		
3019	Tanaka, Eccua		
3020	Broad, Nancy Josephine	Toogoolawah	Toogoolawah



## 1923

### Children enrolled in the scapular

There are lists of children in the T.I. Presbytery archives showing that 19 children were enrolled in the “Scapular of Mount Carmel” in 1921, 24 in 1924 and 28 in 1927. The number of children “for Confirmation” in 1921 is given as 20. An explanation of the scapular has been given in the chapter on the Catholic Church at the end of the nineteenth century. It is most likely that the scapular was explained to the children in many more years than these listed. It is merely that records are extant for these years.



An interesting breakdown of Catholics and non-Catholics is given in the lists for 1921. We read: “*Children on Roll:- 45 Catholics. 53 Non Catholics. 10 not enrolled.*”

### Insights from Inspectors’ Reports, 1921-1925

Besides the usual coverage of individual subjects and class achievements there are a couple of particular matters mentioned in the Report of 1923. One follows the mention that part Songs are pleasingly rendered. It declares bluntly: “*The boys do not sing.*” In another place it mentions that the library is well organized and well used and that “Civics & Temp. receive due attention.” Does “Temp.” refer to Temperance?

The 1924 Report<sup>1</sup> is quite favourable:

*“The government is very effective. A very nice tone prevails throughout. The pupils, many of whom are of non-European descent are bright and responsive, well behaved, and keen on their work. Habits of politeness, self-restraint and industry are being successfully inculcated.”... “Work in the infants section is in a healthy progressive state. The tone there is very pleasing.” “Chip carving is a favourite occupation of some of the boarders who show surprising skill at the work.”*

And 1925<sup>2</sup> is no less complimentary:

*“The school fully maintains its former very fine tone. Orderly polite conduct and steady application to lessons with a subdued sound of busy work are impressive features. Children of Eastern and mixed aboriginal stock form a large proportion of the pupils and these readily respond to the firm but kind and wholesome rule of the school.” ... “School songs are very nicely sung; and the work shown in exercise books is, as usual, creditable. Needlework is a strong feature, both plain and fancy work being exceptionally well done.”*

*“Among the boarders are a number of orphans some of whom show exceptional skill in drawing, needlework (plain and fancy) and simple wood carving. Others are under successful training in working, laundry work and other domestic occupations. Most of the boarders are half-casts.”*

And it is interesting to note that in 1925 there is mention of shorthand and book-keeping being among the subjects taught “*to special senior pupils.*” The quality of the children’s reading aloud and recitation varies from time to time, but in 1925 this aspect of their training gained praise:

*“Oral reading is done with fluency and tolerable expression. There is weakness in “comprehension” in second but elsewhere the pupils show intelligent grasp of what they read. Pieces memorized for reciting are delivered with satisfactory expression.”*

Parsing, analysis and derivation are mentioned. (For periods in the latter parts of the twentieth century these aspects of analyzing words and sentences disappeared from classroom practice. They relate to whether words in a sentence are nouns, adjectives etc. and whether a word is a “subject” or a “predicate” and whether words are singular or plural, and whether verbs are in active or passive “voice” etc.)

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Inspector Clement Fox, 9th September, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Inspector Clement Fox, 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1925.

## Other Sisters

These three Sisters photographed are Sister Rosalie, Sister Joseph and Sister Melani but their exact dates on Thursday Island are not known.



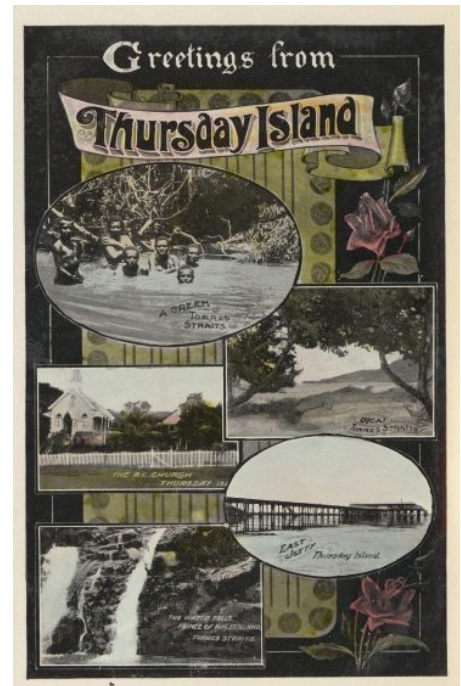
## School Picnic and accident, 1925

School picnics for school children on Thursday Island are featured regularly in press reports from now on. When school picnics began is not known. They usually involved taking the children by ferry to Prince of Wales or another island. *The Townsville Daily Bulletin* of 19<sup>th</sup> October, 1925<sup>3</sup> relates:

*"The Convent school held their annual picnic at Prince of Wales Island on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> instant and a most enjoyable day was spent. The public subscribed liberally and the pupils had a good time with plenty of good things to eat and drink and a good sports programme was also provided. ... A serious accident occurred on the afternoon of the picnic when Mr. H. Flannery's new launch overloaded with picnickers had left the jetty steps and was returning to unload some of the passengers, there being too many in the boat, an onlooker on the jetty went to the assistance by bringing the boat alongside unluckily put one foot on the side of the boat, overbalancing the boat which quickly filled and capsized the occupants mostly girls in the water, they were soon rescued from the water badly shaken but none the worse for their experience."*

## Education Minister's Annual Report, 1925

The schools on Thursday Island were inspected by Mr. District Inspector Fox. A summary of the Report appeared in the *Cairns Post* on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1925. The Report is very general and it is not known whether "The schools" at Thursday Island include the Convent as well as the State Schools. For at this time there are two State schools, one for "Coloured children" and one for all other children. Consequently a summary will not be given here but if the reader wishes, the name of the inspector and rough date of the inspection are given here and can be referred to.



## Governor's visit, 1925

The Governor of Queensland, Sir Matthew Nathan, visited T.I. in November, 1925. *The Townsville Daily Bulletin* of 26<sup>th</sup> November<sup>4</sup> states: "Sir Matthew then visited places of importance including the hospital and the three schools." The three schools are the Convent school, the State school and the Coloured school as explained in a previous chapter.

<sup>3</sup> P.6.

<sup>4</sup> P.6.



## Bazaar, 1926



*"A huge bazaar in aid of the R.C. building fund was held on the nights of 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> in the Convent School and grounds. All manner of devices, from boxing ring to fish ponds and jumble stalls were employed to extract the cash from the pockets of the visitors and as a result of their efforts the sum of 600 pounds was realised. "Who said bad times" after that."<sup>5</sup>*

(Photo shows Mother M Veronica, Superior, on T.I. 1926)

## CWA gifts, 1927

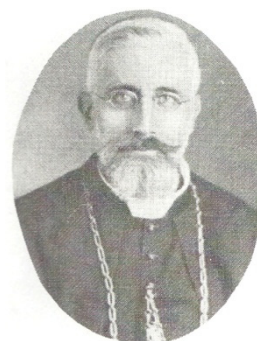
The Queensland Country Women's Association<sup>6</sup> made donations to the three schools. *"Two swings have been given to the aboriginal school on the Island, one swing and basket ball outfit to the Convent, and two to the State school."*

## Farewell to Father Bach, 1927

*"A large gathering of citizens met in the Convent School room on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> to bid farewell to the Rev. Father Bach, on the eve of his departure for the Gilbert Islands. Mr. J. P. James occupied the chair, several musical items were rendered by Convent school pupils ..."*<sup>7</sup>



There is mention, too, in the same article of Sister Martha of the Sacred Heart Mission going to Port Moresby.



## Annual Picnic, 1927

*"The Convent held their annual children's picnic on the 31<sup>st</sup> ultimo. A very enjoyable day was spent, grown ups and children both partaking to make it a success. The weather was delightful, and the sea trip both over and home was enjoyed immensely by both old and young. Races for the children were the main object in the way of sport for the day. Being Saturday, it was very difficult for some people to go all day, such as those who were in business and office. Launches conveyed these unfortunates at 2 p.m. The F... Race was won by Miss Katherine Byrnes with Misses Burgess and Hennessey second and third respectively. All passed off well without accidents etc., and departed for home about 5 p.m."*

## Jubilee Celebrations: Thursday Island turns 50!

1877, the foundation date of the settlement on Thursday Island, makes 1927 the Island's 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday. And celebrations there were aplenty! And the Convent children played no mean part. A central feature of the celebrations was a grand procession across town, finishing at the old Resident's home, near the present (2011) hospital. There, a character dressed as Mr. Chester, the original Government Resident, re-enacted the landing of Mr. Chester and the inauguration of Thursday Island.

## 1928

George Joyce of Thursday Island wins a scholarship in 1928. He may be a convent boy or possibly a boy from the State school.

## State Scholarship Examination,

No.	Name.	School.	Centre.
1826	Lennon, Allen Charles	Texas	Texas
1827	Joyce, George	Thursday Island	Thursday Isl.
1828	Cannell, John Harry	Cressbrook Lower	Topoolawah
1829	Blank, Ray Edgar	Ask	

<sup>5</sup> Townsville Daily Bulletin, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 1926.

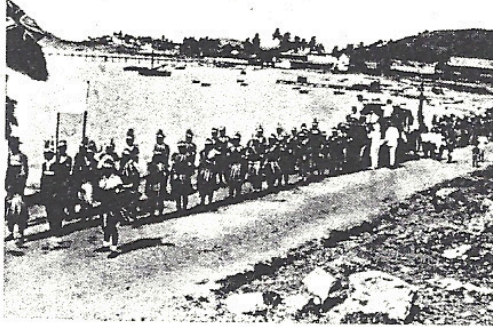
<sup>6</sup> The Queenslander, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1927, p.42. It seems that the gifts were from the CWA. The introduction of the press report is missing.

<sup>7</sup> Townsville Daily Bulletin, 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1927, p.9. Some details of Father Bach's considerable time on T.I. is given in another place.

Captain John Foley has gathered a number of photos of the celebrations and they appear in his illustrated history of T.I., *Timeless Isle*.<sup>8</sup>

62 *Timeless Isle*

## 1927 Jubilee Celebrations



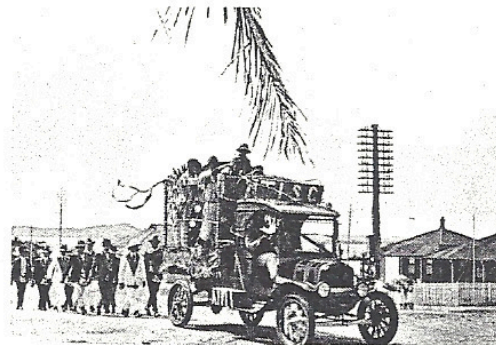
*Torres Strait Islanders waiting for the procession to move.*



*The Town Band, leading the procession, moves off.*



*H. M. Chester (impersonated by G. Clark and assisted by R. Ferguson, E. Fitzgerald and "two trackers") lands on T.I.*



*T.I. Sports Club float, followed by the local Buffaloes.*



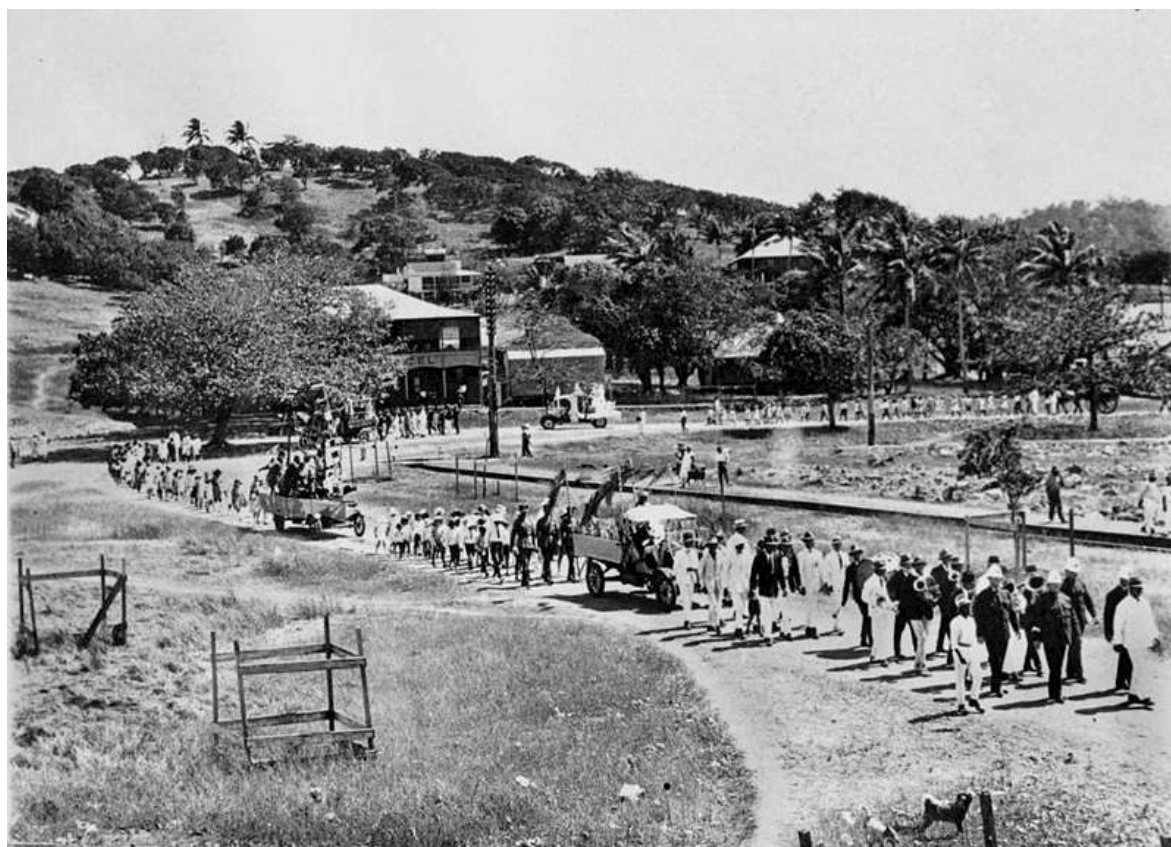
*A contingent of Scouts passes the old fig tree in Douglas Street.*



*Local identity G. Joyce represents an old fossicker.*

<sup>8</sup> P.62.





(This brilliantly clear photo of part of the procession of 1927 is posted on the net by Bonzel. All the Convent schoolchildren are most surely in the photo somewhere.)

### Extraordinary Examination result for Mary B. Flannery, 1928

We learn of the extraordinary typing examination result in *The Brisbane Courier* of 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1928<sup>9</sup>. We find that “two hundred and twenty-one candidates presented themselves for examination”. **Mary Flannery**, Convent School, Thursday Island, topped the order of merit list!

What an achievement! And hopefully the Sisters may have enjoyed a little sip of sherry when the results were learned.



**TYPISTS' EXAMINATION.**

**STATE PUBLIC SERVICE.**

An examination of candidates for admission to the State Public Service as female typists was held in Brisbane and other principal towns of the State on April 28. The subjects of the examination are: Typewriting (two papers), shorthand, and English (dictation and composition). The estimated number of vacancies for which qualified candidates will be required is ten. Two hundred and twenty-one candidates presented themselves for examination. The following are the names of the first ten candidates in order of merit: Mary B. Flannery, Convent School, Thursday Island, 96 per cent.; Marie Brosnan, Nunn and Trivett's College, 93.9 per cent.; Marjorie T. M'Kenzie, Nunn and Trivett's College, 92.5 per cent.; Alice C. Neil, Nunn and Trivett's College, 92.4 per cent.; Maude A. Garrett, private study, 92.8 per cent.; Norah Booth, Stott and Hoare's College and Nunn and Trivett's, 91.4 per cent.; Sheila M'Dougall, Convent High School, Warwick, 90.9 per cent.; Rose Breen, Nunn and Trivett's College, 90.8 per cent.; Mavis F. Franklin, Nunn and Trivett's College, 90.5 per cent.; Eleanor M. Cundy, Nunn and Trivett's College, 90.4 per cent.



This leads to the realisation that one of the important subjects studied in the 1920s was typewriting. So we can well imagine the sound of tap-tap-tapping and the regular ringing of the bell as the carriage neared the end of a line to have been part of school life!

### Sister Osmund

Sister Osmund is recorded as having taught at Sacred Heart School between 1926 and 1936. And it is a pity that not more is known about her personality and style of teaching etc. as ten years is a considerable time in the history of the school.

<sup>9</sup> P.16.

**Some students, 1921-1928 (admitted to the Orphanage)**

	From	Joined	Left
Jesse Moyden	Th. Island	Aug 192(?)	May 1930
Marcellina Remedio	Thursday Island	Ap1924	April 1932
(?)renee Remedio	Th. Is	Ap 1924	April 1932
Ambrosia Oebullio	Th. Is.	Re-admitted Aug 1924	27Jly 1931
Marcella Kanaka	Darnley Is	June 1925	Dec 1930
Angeline Kanaka	Darnley Is	June 1925	ditto above
Teresa Vilamera	Thursday Island	Nov. 1921	Died 1st Nov 1926
Bella Vilamera	Thursday Island	Nov 1921	
Annie Caballio (Carabello)	Sept 1919	Dec 1933	
Rosina Chin Soon	Thursday Island	June 1924	March 1929
Irene Wickman	Manila	April 1924	May 1925
Frances Beech	Daru	April 1924	Deceased Sept 1924
Josephine Chin Soon	Thursday Island	August, 1925	March 1929
Camilla Dorante	Nepean Island	Dec. 1925	
Louisa Wallace	Red Island	Mar. 1927	
Rosie Craig	Moreton Telegraph Station	Ap. 1927	Sept 1938
Amy Mary	Th. Island	August, 1927	Jan 1938
Ethel Teresa	Th. Island		
Eileen Margaret Mary	Th. Island		
Annie Veronica			
Agnes Blanco	Murray Island	Jan. 1928	Dec 1937
Anastalia Kanak	Darnley Is.	June 1928	
Mary Kanak	Darnley Is.	June 1928	Jan 1938
Francesca Dorante	Darnley Is.	Dec. 1928	Feb 1938



The different Sisters teaching during the second half of the 1920s are recalled by Sister M. Osmund in this letter of 1984.<sup>10</sup>

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved!  
26<sup>th</sup> June 1984.

Dear Sr. Bernardette,

On Dec. 27<sup>th</sup> 1926, I accompanied by Sr. M. Barth went ashore on Thursday Island. We were met by Sr. M. Veronica who was then Superior, and Sr. M. Thecla.

The community at that time consisted of the above:-  
Sr. M. Martha one of the first Sisters to arrive in Australia,  
Sisters Sr. Adrian, Sr. de Pazzi, Sr. Lyril, Sr. Assumpta.

Sr. M. Martha left for P. N. G. in March of 1927.

Jan. 1928 Sr. M. Thecla was replaced by Sr. M. Editha.

November 1932 Sr. M. Veronica was replaced by Sr. M. Adam.

Other Sisters who were <sup>here</sup> during my 26-36 years were -  
Sr. M. Urban, Sr. M. Julius, Sr. M. Dorothea & Kaptesta,  
Sr. M. Sylvia. replaced me. Sr. M. Winifred.

Other Sisters whom I can recall as having been there previously  
to Sr. M. Ursula, Sr. M. Athanasius.

Love SR M. OSMUND

<sup>10</sup> Letter held in Sisters' Archives, Kensington, N.S.W. Notice how she writes, "May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved!" at the top of the page. This was the custom of the Sisters and was found in numerous other places in the course of this research.

## CHAPTER 10

### From the Depression, 1929 to 1933

*“During the 1930s the pearling industry felt the unsavoury effects of the world-wide recession”<sup>1</sup>*

It's common to choose 1929 as a turning point in modern history, being, as it is, the year of the start of the world-wide Depression.

#### Governor's Visit

But to begin on a happy note, the visit of the Governor, Sir John, and Lady Goodwin to Thursday Island and to the School. The date is May, 1929, and the world did not have a care; though the looks on the children's faces photographed with the Governor and Mrs. Goodwin do not seem to be radiating joy! Have they a premonition of hard times ahead?

The Sisters and the children may have seen members of the local town council quickly cleaning the streets and giving crossings and bridges a “much needed” coat of whitewash once they heard that the Governor was arriving.<sup>2</sup>

*“The children from the State and Convent Schools lined the approaches of the Jetty and cheered as His Excellency and Lady Goodwin and the party passed along the pier. Later in the day His Excellency was taken to the various places of interest, including the Schools, Hospital, Wanetta Museum, Churches and Waterworks.”*

(The photo is from the Qld State Library, ref: APU-17 (box) and headed: “Sir John and Lady Goodwin at a Convent school on Thursday Island”)



<sup>1</sup> *Thursday Island Centenary, 1877-1977*, Capt. John C. H. Foley, published by T.I. High School, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1929, p.5.



## Visitor's observations

A different visitor gave his impressions in May, 1930<sup>3</sup>. He was Dr. J. P. Thomson. C.B.E. Twenty-first century readers might see his comments as very patronising, but they are presented here in an effort to understand the situation on T.I. in its different stages of history.

*"The natives of the islands of Torres Strait, Mr. Thomson said, still have primitive habits, and their tribal institutions are very interesting. Although living for the most part in primitive conditions, the natives are healthy and of splendid physique. There are well-conducted schools for the children, and their mental capacity compares favourably with that of the whites. Mr. Thomson said it was very interesting to see the youngsters at their primary lessons. They were particularly good at freehand drawing and the girls did excellent needlework."*



## Appearing happier, 1930

This photo is from 1930 and was in the possession of Jean Hamilton in 2011. Jean is in the photo as a seven-year-old and in those days went by the name of Ailsa Frazer. Her father was the Police Magistrate from about 1924 to 1930 and they lived in the Residence. Ailsa (Jean) is indicated, almost hidden, with an arrow and her sister, Kathleen, is shown with a cross.



Some detective work is required to identify the clerics, but it appears to be the visit of a bishop. A number of the early priests on T.I. later became bishops and the return of one of them would have been a cause for celebration. It may be possible to identify some in the photo from other photos.



Almost certainly the cleric in the white is Father Joseph Bach<sup>4</sup>. However the children do look happier than those with the Governor in 1929, particularly the broadly smiling girl at the bottom of the picture.

(The black and white photo of children shows the Frazer children, Kathleen, Jean and Jack on Thursday Island in about 1927.)

## Not impressed

A NSW Member of Parliament, Mr. John Ross, OBE, was less than impressed when his boat finally moored at the T.I. wharf. He wrote in a memoir, *"Nothing within sight looked very imposing, anything visible was in fact rather dilapidated."*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The Brisbane Courier, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1930, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> Father Bach was farewelled from T.I. in 1927. Jean Hamilton believed this photo was from 1930. Either it was from before 1927 or on Fr. Bach's return to T.I. in 1930 for this occasion.

<sup>5</sup> Ross, John, *Away North*, appears privately cyostyled, "Kanimbla", Holbrook, 1968, P.3.. Copy found in the State Library of NSW.

## Asange children and life in the 1930s

Gloria Asange attended the school in the 1930s and recalled the great freedom<sup>6</sup> she and her siblings enjoyed during their childhood of those days:

*"Asange's most distinct memories are of immense freedom she and her siblings enjoyed, running around unhindered all day. ... They caught the rats that plagued the island for pocket money, fished off the jetty where cruise ships docked, swam around wrecks and sat up trees eating fresh mangoes."*

At one stage the Asange children, Bert, Mary, Josie, Bill and Sheila, along with Gloria, were amongst the first to come over to T.I. from Hammond Island to attend school.

*"For several years the family lived on nearby Hammond Island, so went to school and back each day by boat, with their dog Judy splashing behind. The children would swim the last stretch, while their mother stood in the shallows with a rifle, keeping lookout for sharks."*



Born free ... six oldest Asange children, (l-r) Bert, Mary, Josie, Bill, Gloria and Sheila; and (inset) Josie

A child's hobby in the 1930s was "Pen Friends", and newspapers of the time promoted this with children's pages where children could write in seeking pen friends from all over Australia. *The Queenslander* was one such newspaper and Mary Asange was a favourite correspondent of a number of children from around Australia. The editor of the *Junior Readers Letter Box* including *Letters from Little Readers* page, "Aunty Hyacinth", recommended Mary as a correspondent to a number of children. Here is a mention of "Cockatoo" in 1932: In June, 1933 "Cockatoo" writes to the paper saying, "*Mary Asange sent me a photo of the township of Thursday island. I think it is very pretty.*"<sup>7</sup> And in July 1933 "Swanee Butterfly" (13) of Kilcoy wrote: "*Mary Asange sent me some lovely shells the other day which she picked up on Hammond Island.*" During 1932 and 1933 Mary had references from "New Lap", "Golden Bell", "April Shower", and "Pacific Pearls" amongst others.<sup>8</sup> On 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1935 a particular child is recommended: "*You may write to Mary Asange, Hammond Island, via Thursday Island.*"

**"Cockatoo" to Mary Asange, John Street, Thursday Island.**

**Welcome**

New pen-friends to whom I offer a hearty welcome include "Snow Fairy" (Pat Leach; you may write to Hazel Beutel, Tarampa, via Lowood; Josie Asange, Hammond Island via Thursday Island; and Audrie Russell, 210 Sultan Road, Portsmouth, Hants, England). "Keriri Maid" (Josie Asange: I am very pleased to welcome a sister of our old member, Mary, and hope you will be as faithful to the circle as she is. "Varoi" is two years older than you so here is the address of Clare Chestham, who is your own age;

Then when Josie applied for a Pen Friend she got a big welcome based on the long-standing fidelity of Mary to the Pen Friend circle.

<sup>6</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, History feature by Jo Rogers in 2003. The photo is taken from this article. The exact issue of the SMH could not be found.

<sup>7</sup> *The Queenslander*, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1933, p.39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 1932, p.41, 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1932 p.41., 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1932, p.41, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1933, p.40.



## Some Sisters from the 1920s and 1930s



The accompanying photo is from the archives of the Sisters and bears the date, "Probably 1932".

Back row: Sister M. Assumpta, Sr. M. Cyril, Sr. M. Mark, Sr. M. Osmund, Sr. M. Editha, Sr. M. de Pazzi.

Front row: Mother M. Veronica, Mother M. Albert (Superior), Rev. Mother M. Agatha (Mother General).

It's not known the circumstances of the taking of this photo. It could have been the time of a visitation of the Mother General. It should not be thought that all the Sisters in the photo might have been in the Thursday Island Community at the one time.

## Annual picnic, 1930

The picnic tradition continues in style as can be seen by the accompanying facsimile from *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1930<sup>9</sup>.

## The tiny *Torres Straits Daily Pilot*, 1931

The facsimile on the following page is of the one-page *The Torres Daily Pilot* which was published from approx. 1914 to 1941. Some originals are held in the State Library of Queensland. Their size and shape vary but most are about A4 or foolscap and generally were printed on just one side of the page.

This issue has been chosen for reproduction as it includes an invitation to a Grand Fancy Dress Ball in 1931, "*Proceeds in aid of the Sacred Heart Convent*", with an entry charge of 2/6.

Eighty years later, in 2011, Sacred Heart School was continuing the Ball tradition, but the entry fee was \$50!



The annual school picnics were held on the 8th and 15th of November, the State school on the former and the Convent on the latter date. Both events were held on Prince of Wales Island and a most enjoyable day was spent on both occasions. The business firms of the town contribute most liberally towards providing funds and parents of scholars and other willing helpers donate basketfuls of cakes and sandwiches and other good things that gladden the hearts of the children. Launch owners and punt owner run their vessels free of charge to transport the youngsters over to the picnic ground and at 2 p.m. they make another trip and all the adults who can get away make a point of coming over for the afternoon. Sports were held and all the children were prizewinners. Launches and punts returned about 6 p.m. fully loaded with very tired but happy passengers.

This tiny paper gained the reputation of being the smallest and most expensive newspaper in the world.

Only several issues appear to be extant between 1914 and 1941 after searching in a number of possible repositories.

<sup>9</sup> P.8.



# The Torres Straits Daily Pilot

REGISTERED AT THE G.P.O. BRISBANE FOR TRANSMISSION AS A NEWSPAPER.

Thursday Island, August 31, 1931.

Burns, Philp and Co., agents, advise us of the following:

## BURNS PHILP MAIL LINE.

The steamer *Marella* leaves Melbourne on 31st Aug., Sydney 7th Sept., Brisbane 9th, Townsville 12th, and is due at Thursday Island 15th Sept., en route for Singapore.

The steamer *Mangola*, from Singapore, is due at Thursday Island about 15th Sept., en route for Melbourne via ports.

## N.Y.K. LINE.

(Nippon Yusen Kaisha).

Steamers will be despatched as under for Japan via Davao, Manila, and Hongkong—

Kamo Maru 7955 Tons 5th Sept.

The Kitano Maru is due on Thursday.

Tickets to and from Thursday Island and southern ports are now interchangeable between the Burns Philp Singapore line, Eastern and Australian Steamship Company, and the Australian Oriental line.

## PLEASE NOTE—

Any person wishing to board steamers anchored at Black Rock for which Burns, Philp and Co., are agents, must first obtain a permit from the office the day before.

## AUSTRALIAN-ORIENTAL LINE LIMITED.

Morey and Company, agents, advise:

The steamer *Changte* leaves Melbourne on 14th Sept., Sydney 19th, Brisbane 21st, Townsville 25th, Cairns 26th, and is due at Thursday Island on 28th Sept., en route for Hongkong.

The steamer *Taiiping* leaves Hongkong on 15th Sept., Manila 18th, and is due at Thursday Island 26th Sept., en route for Melbourne via ports.

Tickets to and from Thursday Island and southern ports are now interchangeable between Burns, Philp Singapore line, and the Australian Oriental line.

Through passengers by *Sa. Changte* and *Taiiping* for Shanghai and Japan connect at Hongkong with magnificent Empress steamers of 21,000 tons, and other lines.

The *Changte* and *Taiiping* omit Sandakan.

Ships in communication for the ensuing twenty-four hours with the undermentioned radio stations:—

Thursday Island: *Clan McWhirter*, *Il-dington Court*, *Oakbank*, *Paludina*, *Perseus*, *Soli*.

[By special arrangement, Reuters' world service in addition to other special sources of information is used in the compilation of overseas intelligence published in this issue and all rights therein in Australia and New Zealand are reserved.]

Melbourne, Sunday.—The aviator Broadbent left the Mascot aerodrome early this morning in his second attempt to cover the round Australia flight in record time. After a brief stay in Brisbane he will head for Townsville, which will be his destination for a day.

Melbourne, Sunday.—The conversion loan has now reached a total of £400,000.

000 sterling.

Canberra, Sunday.—Commenting on the recent visit of the Commonwealth geological adviser, Dr. Woolnough, to the oilfields of Longreach and Roma, the Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. Blakeley, on Saturday declared that there was every hope that these places might soon be part of an entirely Australian self-supporting system in oil supplies, provided that tried and proved methods were applied with sufficient energy and intensification.

Sydney, Sunday.—The Nelson Cricket Club, Lancashire, England, has sent a cable message to the Australian famous batsmen, Don Bradman, offering to him a big salary, both in summer and winter, to play for that club next season. The club stipulates that Bradman must be prepared to play for that club in the opening match of next season in May of 1932.

London, Sunday.—The expulsion from the Hamstead branch of the Labour party and a request by the Labour Executive at Seahome, asking him to resign his seat in Parliament faces the Prime Minister, Mr. Macdonald, as a result of the forming of a National Emergency Government.

Despite a dramatic letter from a meeting of Mr. Macdonald's supporters at Seahome, it was seriously recommended that he should be asked to resign.

It is now revealed that the various assurance companies came to the rescue of the Government, in which they offered to place their vast American investments at the disposal of the Government.

Calcutta, Saturday, Earthquake shocks, which had continued in a desultory manner in north-west India since Tuesday, culminated on Thursday night with a series of severe shocks which shook the area between Karachi, Quetta, Lahore, Multan, and Hyderabad; and many deaths and much damage has been reported.

It is reported that the town of Sharigh, eighty miles from Quetta, has disappeared.

TOWN HALL, THURSDAY ISLAND  
Friday, 25th September, 1931.

## GRAND FANCY DRESS BALL.

Proceeds in aid of the Sacred Heart Convent

GET YOUR COSTUME READY,

JOIN IN THE FUN.

ADMISSION—2s. 5d.

Printed and published for the Proprietress by A. Corran, Thursday Island.]

## Opening of Infants' School, 1932

A great addition to the school was the acquisition of this building in 1932. It was a surplus military building and was moved to the school site when the Barracks were disbanded.<sup>10</sup>

Previously all the classes were held in the one, hall-like building, including classes on the verandah.

The Torres Hotel can be seen in the background. The School and the Hotel have shared the history of this corner of T.I. for more than 100 years (as at 2012).

(The caption of the photo on the following page declares: "Thursday Island Kindergarten, 1932" and appears in the Heritage Museum on Horn Island. It may, however, have been an Infants' School. (See footnote 5). We'll see in 1934 the opening of a Kindergarten ... in apparently the same building! At the time of writing (2012) this remains a mystery.)

This undated photo of the Sisters' convent was sent from the Sisters' General House Archives in Rome. It seems access from the right hand side is boarded up. The space under the building is large and Ina and Cessa Mills recall that it was from under one of those corners that "Morning Tea" or "Lunch" of syrup on bread, was served.

The two covered-in rooms at each end of the front verandah housed pianos and the Sisters taught piano in these rooms. The



school and the "school yard" are below the steps to the convent and it was from the music rooms that a child would play the piano in the morning to accompany the children marching into school. This is mentioned in some Inspectors' Reports over the years.

<sup>10</sup> Earle, Sandra J. *A Question of Defence: The Story of Green Hill Fort, T.I.*, Torres Strait Historical Society, 1993, p.52: "The Catholic Church purchased the Sergeant Major's Office in 1932 to add to their existing classroom. The building was purchased for 20 pounds and was brought down the hill by Mr. Jim Cadzow. It became the Infants' School and was opened by the Premier of Queensland, the Honourable Ted Hanlon, in the presence of Mayor Mr. Corran, church and school staff, students and their families."





### Government payment to Orphanage (1933)

Each student at the Orphanage was paid ten shillings per week till the age of 16. Confirmation of this arrangement came in a letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1933, from the Home Secretary's Office, Brisbane. This arrangement had probably been going for some years though the year of origin is not known at the time of writing (2011).

When the Orphanage was established in 1889 the arrangement was that if the parents or guardians could afford it, they would pay one pound sterling per child per week. This government subsidy is half that amount.

A letter from the Home Secretary's Office, dated 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1933, confirms that this payment will be continued.

In another document, undated in itself but attached to the 1933 bundle in the Qld State Archives file, is mention that there are 25 children in the orphanage. It also refers to the anxiety of the Sisters for the wellbeing of girls older than 14, when the subsidy was planned to be discontinued, and they sought permission to have the subsidy continue up to the age of 16 when the girls would be much better equipped to fend for themselves. And it was decided by the government authority to allow the subsidy to continue till the age of 16<sup>11</sup>. It's interesting, also, to note in passing, that the Sisters were caring at this time, 1933, for a young woman of 23 years of age.<sup>12</sup>

For many years the Roman Catholic Mission in Thursday Island has conducted an orphanage in which orphan female children of aboriginal or halfcaste parents were received, cared for and educated.

At present there are twentyfive children in the orphanage and the Mission is granted a sum of 10/- per week per child to assist in their maintenance.

Provision for this expenditure appears in the Department's Estimates.

Hitherto it has been understood that this payment shall be made for children not exceeding the age of fourteen years. Such a regulation in this instance can be regarded as drastic. It is impossible for the orphanage to discharge females of fifteen years of age to associate with the halfcaste population of Thursday Island. Experience has shown that all girls sent to employment from the orphanage have gone wrong.

The Reverend Mother in charge of the orphanage is of opinion that it is decidedly unfair to discharge these girls at that age and the economic position prevents her retaining them if the Government subsidy is withdrawn.

She considers however that at the age of sixteen years the girls would be more fitted to be sent to employment or transferred to the Hammond Island Mission, where ultimately they could join the village community or marry with the Hammond Island men.

There can be no question of the wisdom of this attitude and it is recommended that the orphanage receive payment of maintenance at the rate of 10/- per week for all girls up to the age of sixteen years.

The reader will read with alarm a statement in this letter that, "*Experience has shown that all girls sent to employment from the orphanage have gone wrong.*" Might this be sadly true, or could the statement be a dramatic and rhetorical one in support of the subsidy being raised to 16 years?

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Home Secretary's Office, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1933. Qld. State Archives.

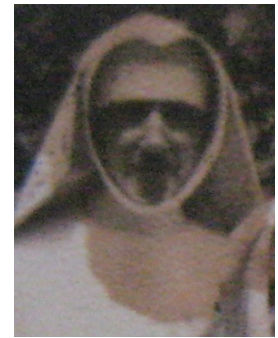
<sup>12</sup> Letter from Office of Chief Protector of Aborigines, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1933.

## Sisters in the convent community, 1929-1932



The following Sisters are recorded as having been part of the Sisters' community, 1929-1932, at one stage or another: Sisters Mark (1926-1932), Osmund, (1926-1936), Mother Adrian, (1932), Sisters Assumpta, (1932), Editha, (1932), De Pazzi, (1932), Sr. Cyril, (1932), Sr. Urban, (1932-1941).

(Accompanying photos are of Sister Editha (left) and Sister Assumpta (right).)



## The Depression 1929-c.1933

There seems to be little written on the effect of the World Depression on the lives of the people on Thursday Island. A slight reference is given by Captain Foley in his illustrated History<sup>13</sup>. He says:

*"In 1928, new shell grounds were discovered west of P.O.W. Island. Production leaped to 1,400 tonnes in 1929. Prices were good at the time and prosperity reigned. Then came a collapse in 1931 with the world recession. Ten lean years later the industry was just starting to get back on its feet when the war came."*

In another place he writes<sup>14</sup>:

*"Tragically, these heady, wondrous, happy days [late 1920s] were to turn sour all too soon. The insidious tentacles of the spreading cancer of recession were reaching out towards T.I. In the early 1930s, gloom and apprehension replaced buoyant optimism as industry slumped. Friction between Japanese and European divers did not help matters, nor did the arrival of several Japanese-flag sampans to poach pearl-shell from the local beds. The 1930s were not good years for T.I."*



(The photo with the windmill provides the best picture of the new 1932 Infants/Kindergarten School)

## Inspectors' Reports of 1930 and 1931

Of a total enrolment of 113, 95, in 1930 were either coloured or of coloured extraction. The school was divided into eight "class" groups and the inspector believed this was too many for the three Sisters.

Because of the large number of coloured children and the perception that their progress was not so fast as the European children, the Inspector makes some suggestions and refers to the practices at the School for Coloured Children:

*"Difficulties regarding effective organisation are increased owing to the fact that in a considerable number of instances the coloured children are not able to keep pace with some of the more fortunately situated European children. It will be noted, for example, that the average age for grade 2 is 10.5, whereas the third grade is 8.5 years. The adjacent School for aboriginal children at Thursday Island works to a specifically compiled syllabus, based on the probable mental capacity of native children. It is considered, if organisation effectively permits of its being done, that the bulk of the native children should confine themselves to school work within the realm of possible ability. The interests of other children, would, however, require naturally to be duly safeguarded."*

The inspector discussed the new (1930) Syllabus with the teachers and believed that they were managing well with its introduction.

The pleasant and encouraging atmosphere in the school, noted in reports in the 1920s, are repeated in the report of 1931:

<sup>13</sup> *Timeless Isle*, p.52.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.



*“Discipline is strong and stimulating, and obedience is willing and immediate; the pupils being governed by kindness and encouragement rather than any coercion. In the playground the children enter heartily into their games and display good sportsmanship. In school they are quiet and industrious. The tone of the school is healthy and pleasant.”*

The racial composition of the children in the school is given in detail along with comments on trying to teach children of varying ability and stages of attainment:

*“Only 23 pupils out of 104 enrolled (=22%) are wholly of European extraction. The aim of the teachers is to advance the “white” pupils through the school course without any retardation if possible. The following figures show the racial descent of the children:- European 23; Half-European 19; Chinese 8; Half-Chinese 7; Aboriginal 11; Half-Aboriginal 14; Half-Malay 6; Half-Philipino 13; Half-Indian 2; Half Samoan 1. The teachers find it impossible to secure normal progress for all these children and consequently some have to be retarded.”*

### **Beginning of the Hammond Island Mission, 1929**

Intimately linked with the history of Sacred Heart School, T.I., is the Catholic Mission on Hammond Island. At different times over the years the children from Hammond Island have travelled daily to Sacred Heart to attend school. The mission was the initiative of Father John Doyle, MSC, who in 1928 raised the idea with his provincial that the church would do well to create a haven for families of mixed race away from the troubles of other areas.<sup>15</sup> The story of the Hammond Island Mission has an entire history of its own, and has its own great foundation members including Father Owen McDermott, MSC and Brother John Barrett. Writing of Father McDermott, who arrived in 1928, Littleton writes:

*“Over a period of three or four years he supervised the construction of homes for mixed race people as well as a church (1930), a presbytery (1931), a school (1932) and a boys’ house.”<sup>16</sup>*

Later, after the war, Brother Andrew Howley arrived as the teacher. The complete story of the school on Hammond Island is told in other chapters in the work.

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<sup>15</sup> Littleton, James, M.S.C., *Sacred Heart Mission Torres Strait 1884-1967*, Fyshwick, ACT, 2009, p.34.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

## CHAPTER 11

### St. Joseph's School, Hammond Island, 1929-1942

Throughout its history from roughly 1929 onwards, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, has been intimately bound up with the story of the Hammond Island Mission and its school, St. Joseph's. The story of the establishment of Hammond Island as a Catholic Mission has been told elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. Suffice it to say here that in 1927 Father John Doyle, who had been appointed to Thursday Island, conceived of the idea for a Catholic Mission and applied to the Director of Native Affairs to seek permission to reserve part of Hammond Island as a place for a Catholic settlement.

Prior to that there had been a "reservation" for Municipal purposes established in 1881 and a number of Kaurareg Aboriginal people, the traditional owners of the island, lived there. In 1889 there had been short-lived "gold rush" which brought a number of adventurers to the island. In 1901 there was the proclamation of an Aboriginal Reserve of 1282 acres. In 1907 there were sufficient Kaurareg residents on Hammond Island to be able to contribute a dance troupe for the entertainment of the Governor General on Thursday Island when he visited there.



Then in 1922 the Protector of Aborigines had the Kaurareg people living on Hammond Island forceably removed to the village of Poid on Moa Island I, so from then on the island was virtually uninhabited.

For readers unfamiliar with the geography of the area, Hammond Island lies just over a kilometer north of Thursday Island and is roughly five times the size of Thursday Island. It appears from a distance to be entirely covered in trees, and shows very little sign of human habitation except for one small area.

(Photo shows Father John Doyle, left, and Father Owen McDermott, right)

#### Initial idea and beginning

Father Doyle's motivation sprang from his fear that good young Catholic men and boys, if they were to stay on Thursday Island, would succumb to various undesirable lifestyles. If they could be raised away from these influences, their chances of living good moral lives, with purpose and contentment, would be vastly enhanced. In a letter to Mr. P. McLaughlan, M.L.A., dated 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1928, Father Doyle wrote<sup>2</sup>, explaining why he was making the application for establishing such a mission:

*"I might say it is because nothing was being done for them [the half-cast youths of Thursday Island], and there are no prospects, that I decided to try this scheme which would give them a home and honest occupation in agricultural, poultry and fishing pursuits. They would be away from the evil influence and example which here [Thursday Island] surrounds them."*

It was from this initial hope that began, virtually from scratch, a Catholic community on Hammond Island that slowly developed into what might be described as a tiny town ... in a little world of its own; almost a separate micro country.

A brief summary history found in the MSC archives in Sydney, undated, but clearly written in the mid 1950s from internal evidence, relates:

*"Father Owen McDermott arrived from Sydney in March 1929 to assist in the establishment of the mission. A house of second-hand galvanized iron was erected near the beach to shelter the priest and the boys. The*

<sup>1</sup> See Littleton, James, *Sacred Heart Mission Torres Strait, 1884-1967*, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Fyshwick, A.C.T., 2009, and Deere, Tyrone C., *Stone on Stone, Story of Hammond Island Mission*, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, Thursday Island, 1994, and Shnukal, Anna, Dr., *The Filipino Contribution to St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Mission at Hammond Island (Keriri)*.

<sup>2</sup> Letter in MSC Archives, Kensington, N.S.W.



*Mission dates its origin from the first Mass celebrated by Father Doyle in this house on Ascension Thursday, 1929. Fr. McDermott with his miniature "Boys Town" took up residence immediately and set about the task of making a mission out of a wilderness. As most of the boys were of school age, Father taught school on the verandah each morning and devoted the afternoons to gardening, care of poultry and pigs and the erection of a school-church which was ready for use at Christmas. The boys took turns in cooking for themselves and the priest, whose stomach ulcers today remind him of the frequency of curry and rice on the menu."*

Father Doyle's account of the beginning of the Mission is contained in a letter to his religious superior dated 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1929 is thus<sup>3</sup>:



(Photo shows the first church near the beach.)

Father Doyle also states that *"for these latter pursuits [working the land and looking after poultry] I have obtained the services of a few old Manila men as teachers..."* He is already thinking about getting a Brother to help: *"If we get a big boat as we hope to shortly, a Brother is almost essential. I think a man like Bro Barker would fit right into this work."*

(Photo shows Father Doyle on the left and Father McDermott on the right. The central figure is unidentified at the time of writing, but could have been the Fathers' superior, visiting at the time, or maybe, even, Bishop O'Loughlin. The location and occasion are unknown. But since it is such a beautiful photo and so evocative of the time, and since Father Doyle and Father McDermott are so intimately connected with Hammond Island, it was thought suitable to place it here.)

*"Fr. McDermott is very well and I think improving in health every day since coming to these parts. I appreciate very much his help and companionship. His coming has made Hammond Island a reality and last week the boys who had been at the presbytery [on Thursday Island] were transferred across. Fr. McDermott is staying there most of the time but we occasionally change places. ...Poultry rearing, agriculture and fishing are the principal pursuits which are now in operation there. Of course there is school too every day for the small boys."*



## 1931-2, a time of building



Various points of progress both with the Mission and particularly the school are mentioned in a letter of Fr. McDermott, dated 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1932:

*"The life on Hammond is not one of luxury and you will find very few priests who will be content with it. Thank God we now have a respectable home for the priest [1931] but there is a great deal of building and hard work ahead – school, new church, convent and orphanage as well as a new boys' house to take the place of the present shanty which may collapse during the N.W. monsoon." ... "The Bishop has told me that I can go for a few months' holiday after Easter [to recuperate from near exhaustion] by which time the school should be completed..."*

<sup>3</sup> Deere, Tyrone. Many of the quotations that follow are from Father Tyrone Deere's compilation of the letters related to the Hammond Island Mission. His book *Stone on Stone* was published in 1994.

## CARING FOR THE ABORIGINAL Amending Bill For Next Session

A Bill embracing a series of amendments of the Aborigines Act will be introduced by the Government during the forthcoming session of Parliament. It will aim at protecting the morals of the natives by giving the State greater power to control coloured foreigners in their relations with aborigines. The Bill was drafted for last session, but time did not permit of its introduction.

Mr. Hanlon said the problem of the cross-breed and half-caste was present in most seaboard towns on the Queensland coast, but was most noticeable at Thursday Island, which he had recently visited. The Catholic Church had established a settlement at Hammond Island, near Thursday Island, for these cross-breeds. He had visited Hammond Island, and found that over 80 persons were in residence there under the care of the Rev. Father Doyle, who was expecting the arrival of ten more families. Father Doyle had told him these people were fast realising that their best chance lay in settling in a community where they were able to live on equal terms with one another, and not as inferiors to all races. They were well provided for, in a neat village, with gardens attached to their homes, and were able to live by fishing and agriculture. Generally he found them a contented community, and he was told that once they settled there they had an aversion to going across to Thursday Island. It was hoped that in the near future they would all be absorbed in this way. The apparent success of this system might furnish the Government with a solution of the same problem on the mainland.

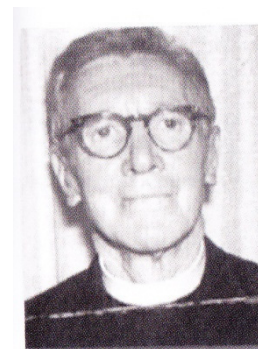
The reader may like to pause and take in the scene of the early Mission.<sup>4</sup> The photo is from about 1933. The Presbytery, built in 1931, is the building furthest away in the photo. The viewer is looking roughly to the North-East. The building with the tiny porch is the “new” Church; not the one first erected near the beach. The building in the foreground is the “new” school building with a verandah and covered area at the back. The building beyond the school building is the “Boys’ House”.

There is the first mention of the arrival of Brother John Barrett in the same letter. Brother Barrett was to be a very fundamental member of the founding group of the Mission and school. Fittingly when sports teams were given names, one of the Houses was called “Barrett”. Indeed the three teams were “Doyle”, “McDermott” and “Barrett”.

*“Father Doyle and Father Finch are both very well and Br Barrett is a strong and happy in his work. He likes Hammond Is. very much and though not an ideal helper is still of great assistance. Just now Mother Albert is here indicating by her example the correct decorum nuns should observe. She has been much better in her attitude to Hammond Island than the most optimistic expected and we hope to have a convent on Hammond in the near future.”*



Father McDermott almost wore himself to exhaustion and wisely was granted a period of holiday/recuperation during 1932. He thought there may have been a better suited man than Brother Barrett. And so we read in a letter to Father Doyle from his Provincial



(with whom Fr. McDermott was staying) in June 1932:

*“Father McDermott is here [recuperating] and is gradually picking up. He is asking for a lay-brother to replace Br. Barrett and suggests Bro. Greenfield who is most enthusiastic about going to the Missions.”*

Father Doyle puts in a bid for Brother Greenfield (pictured) in a letter to his Provincial in July 1932:

*“When these [outer islands] are visited somebody responsible must be left at Hammond Island. A Brother who could do a bit of school work and look after things in general. Unfortunately Brother Barrett is not the best for this kind of work though he is very willing at all times to do his best. He would be an excellent man in his right sphere but I don't think that this is the best place for him as things are just at present. Bro. Greenfield, I imagine would be good for outdoor works. Would he also be a help for the school? I certainly think he would be much more suitable than Bro. Barrett.”*

And by November, 1932, Father Doyle writes, “At Hammond a new school is just about completed.” And by this time Brother Greenfield has arrived to help and assist in the school.

An insight into buildings erected in the early 1930s is found in the undated paper held in the MSC Archives in Sydney:

*“The present presbytery was occupied early in 1932 and a new church was erected that year. A comfortable house was built for the boys adjacent to the presbytery and a building on Horn Island was bought and re-erected to serve as the Mission school, housing over 40 pupils.”*

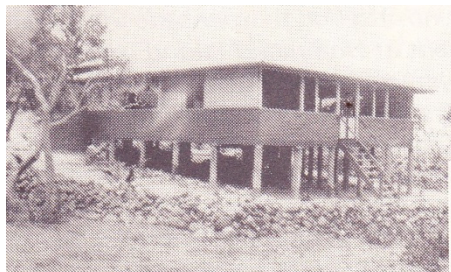
<sup>4</sup> This photo and many of those included in this history of Hammond Island school, are from the collection of Peter Sabatino.



In the middle of 1935 Father Doyle writes to his Provincial and the Provincial Consultors:

*".. The Sisters wish at once to build a convent at Hammond Island and to keep two extra Sisters there for school work commencing next year...."*

This came true, as we learn from the archives document mentioned earlier:



*"In 1935 a convent was built. This was occupied at the beginning of 1936 by two Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart [Sister Mary Laurencia and Sister Mary Dorothea] and became responsible for the domestic side of the presbytery and the boys' home. With the installation of the Sisters in the school the pioneering phase of the Mission may be said to have ended."*<sup>5</sup>

Father Doyle mentions, when listing expenses in 1932: *"Support of about 12 orphan boys at Hammond Island."*

He mentions, too, the favourable press reports from the visit for The Home Secretary for Queensland (Mr Hanlon) in the newspapers. Mr. Hanlon had visited Hammond Island previously in 1934 and the press report entitled "Caring for the Aboriginal" is taken from The *Courier-Mail* of 19<sup>th</sup> July of that year.<sup>6</sup> A 1935 press report headed "News to Mr. Hanlon" with its favourable report on the Mission on Hammond Island is from the *Courier-Mail* of 26<sup>th</sup> June.<sup>7</sup>

In June 1936 it is learned that Brother Greenfield is shortly to head south, though it was reported,

*"The Sisters are doing very well on Hammond Island and recently had a visit from Mother Josepha, from Kensington, who expressed her pleasure in her visitation." ... "Father McDermott, Bro Barrett and myself are very well and we unite in conveying our best wishes to you."*

*6. School! 16 boys . 8 girls : 24  
Average attendance excellent.  
School year observed as in State School, P.I.  
Special holidays: St. Patrick's Day,  
8<sup>th</sup> April, Nov. 1st.  
Teacher, Bro J. Greenfield.  
Assistant. P. Sabatino.*

While Brother Greenfield was the teacher in 1935 the Report on the School by Father Owen McDermott noted the attached information about the school at that time. (See handwritten box)

## Coming of the OLSH Sisters to Hammond Island, 1936

We know the names of the first Sisters, but unfortunately no photos could be found before publication:

*"the MSC sisters were installed on 26 February 1936. By 1938 it had 35 pupils and the mission's population had grown to 122."*<sup>8</sup> *The first two Sisters to teach at the school on Hammond Island were Sister M. Laurencia and Sister M. Dorothea."* (Photo is of Sister Dorothea.)



The Annual Report on Hammond Island<sup>9</sup> for 1937 mentions: *"Girls taught sewing and dressmaking, boys woodwork recreations; Basketball, cricket, football etc."* In 1939 there is mention that, *"The rural school is now completed and a lay-brother has been appointed to teach regular lessons in general handiwork. He is due to arrive early in the New Year and is a man of long experience among the Natives of both Palm and Bathurst Islands."* In 1940 there were 14 boys and 9 girls in the school. In 1941 The Report states that,

<sup>5</sup> Photo from Deere, un-numbered pages. It has the caption: "Convent Hammond Island 1937"

<sup>6</sup> P.14.

<sup>7</sup> P.13

<sup>8</sup> From Shnukal

<sup>9</sup> Reports held in the Archives, Presbytery, Thursday Island.

*"Nine of the older boys have received instruction in general handiwork, and the progress has been satisfactory. Interest was shown by all the boys and three or four showed distinct promise. Several tables and chairs were made during the year. It was proposed during the coming year to use a few of the boys for construction work on the Mission but owing to war time conditions it may not be possible to do much in that line."*



While the date of the picture of the boys playing cricket is not accurately known, it pictures a common sight of Australian boys throughout the nation. It could be anywhere in Australia at any time. And it was certainly during the period of the greats of Bradman, McCabe etc.

The following photo<sup>10</sup> shows a young David Sing with a group of students in the early 1930s. Historian James Littleton, MSC, states David Sing, *"taught in the Hammond Island school for three years in the early 1930s."*<sup>11</sup> It was David Sing who in 1935 painted the wall of the T.I. Church behind the altar and who later joined the Carthusian Order of monks in Europe. This story is told in a later chapter.

**NEWS TO MR. HANLON**

"I have not heard of any such action," said the Home Secretary (Mr. Hanlon) last night. However, the local protector, Mr. McLean, P.M., or the police might find it necessary to have some natives taken to settlements, in the interest of the community or of their own health. A careful watch was kept for venereal disease among the aborigines, and on the least sign they were removed to Fantome Island for treatment.

The only movement he had noticed for removing blacks from Thursday Island while he was there on an official visit last year was that connected with the Catholic Mission on Hammond Island, added Mr. Hanlon. Father Doyle, the priest in charge, encouraged native families to go there voluntarily from Thursday Island, where they were regarded as inferiors and were subject to the influence of an undesirable class of whites and certain members of other races. On Hammond Island they were all equals, and had their own exclusive settlement, which was composed of neat and clean cottages. They were the most cheerful and contented blacks he had seen on his tour, and Father Doyle had assured him that they had practically lost all desire to return to Thursday Island. There were about 80 families on Hammond Island, but there was no suggestion of compulsion about their presence there.



<sup>10</sup> Provided by Margaret See Kee.

<sup>11</sup> Littleton, p.36.



## Favourable publicity

Perhaps the most favourable and descriptive account of the progress of the Mission was that reported in the *Courier Mail* on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1937. It is reproduced here in facsimile with the heading “Solving problem of half-casts”:

### SOLVING PROBLEM OF HALF-CASTES Successful Work On Hammond Island

#### MR. HANLON IMPRESSED

From Our Special Representative  
THURSDAY ISLAND, Friday.

A practical solution of Australia's half-caste problem is being worked out at Hammond Island, off Cape York, by two Sacred Heart missionaries, the Rev. Fathers J. Doyle and O. McDermott.

They have established a settlement where crossbreeds may live independent of the white and black races, and may rear their families under the best community conditions.

Hammond Island is only three miles from Thursday Island, where the Sacred Heart Fathers have been working for many years. Nine years ago the priests obtained Government permission to begin work at Hammond Island.

#### Rural School Plan

The plan has been successful, and there are now 130 people on the island, including 42 children, who are taught by two Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

The men work in the pearling industry, on boats, or in other occupations, and support their families. The mission's chief work is on the spiritual and educational side, although Father McDermott, whose particular care is the Hammond Island mission, is assisted in keeping an eye on the people's material well-being by Brother Barrett, a lay member of the Sacred Heart Order.

The children are particularly apt at fretwork, carving, and other manual arts. The Queensland Minister for Home Affairs (Mr. Hanlon), who called at the island on his tour of aboriginal settlements, was so pleased with the progress of the mission that he is considering the establishment on the island of a rural school, at which manual work may be taught by a lay brother. Hammond Island is the only half-caste settlement in Queensland, apart from one which the Government is about to establish at Purga, near Ipswich.

#### Minister Promises Help

Fathers Doyle and McDermott accompanied Mr. Hanlon and his party on the visit. An archway was erected

on the beach, and the people were lined up to welcome the visitors. Ascending the hill along a white-bordered path, the Minister visited the school chapel and convent, and addressed the children, who entertained him at a brief concert.

The school building is not large enough to accommodate all the children who now attend, and the Minister promised to assist in its enlargement. He undertook to supply a fishing net for the men and to help in other directions.

## Devastation of Sister Marietta's drowning

A most devastating occurrence in the history of the Mission on Hammond Island was the drowning of Sister Marietta Roche, not far from the shore of Hammond Island, in 1938. Details of this tragedy are told in a chapter entitled “The Year 1938”.

## End of the 1930s

The final known press report concerning the Hammond Island Mission before the evacuation to Cooyar in 1942 is the passing reference reproduced here from the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1939 p.7.



But just before the

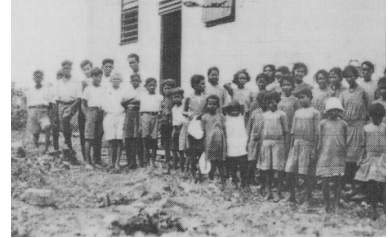
evacuation during the war there is a tiny reference to Hammond Island joining the celebrations on T.I. for the coronation of King George VI (Queen Elizabeth II's father) in 1938 tells of a float being constructed on a horse and cart with Mr. Caviari Sebasio representing the King in the pageant and Mrs. Syl Blanco as the Queen.<sup>12</sup> The story on the back of a photo tells of the float coming second in the “Best Turnout” but winning the “Worst Turnout”. The second in the “Best” was because of the

Hammond Island Roman Catholic mission, in Torres Strait, had had excellent results as a half-caste settlement. The inhabitants conducted their own industries and store on co-operative lines, and controlled the affairs of their village. In many respects white communities did no better.

<sup>12</sup> 125<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, p.34.

care and effort put into the float and the “Worst” award was because during the procession a wheel came off the cart and the King and Queen had to continue on horseback!

The following photos appear to be during the 1930s:



(The above photo could be the occasion of the blessing and opening of the school, or it could be a procession.)



## Childhood recollections

Mary Bin-Juda, one of many past students of that time, recalls an unpleasant duty Sister Rosario imposed on the children in the late 1930s. They all had to line up each day and take a spoonful of whitish dugong oil, which the children hated but which they had to take. Presumably it was akin to castor oil on the mainland, a similar, allegedly beneficial medicine, that children dreaded taking. She remembers, too, a long cane which she kept for the boys. Reg Sabatino recalled the irony of having to select suitable cane material from the bush ... and then finish up on the receiving end of the cane he had supplied.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Stories from both Mary Bin-Juda and Reg Sabatino were told to Brother Barry in 2012.



Describing Sister Rosario as “really good”, Mary Bin-Juda told of being entrusted with the care of some of the smaller children at different times. But her recollections of efforts to bring a little money into the family are a revelation for the modern reader. As a young teen Mary was made to collect fruit (mangoes, bananas etc.) and take them in a basket to T.I. to sell “door-to-door” including in the hotels.<sup>14</sup> She remembers, too, scouting around in the bush for black beans on a vine, bringing them home, cracking them open, gathering the seeds and packing them in sacks. Exactly what they were she is not sure, but then her father would sell them somewhere on T.I.

In the late 1930s sports contests between the children at the convent school on T.I. and the children at the school on Hammond were eagerly anticipated and were held on Hammond Island. Besides running races there were sack bag races, three-legged races, high jump and long jump amongst other events.

(The photo shows a game of tunnel-ball in the 1930s)



These recollections of Mary Bin-Juda are only those of one from the period but, in a way, represent similar experiences of many past students.

## War, evacuation and new life in Cooyar, 1942

Then in February, 1942, there was the tumultuous upheaval of the evacuation to Cooyar that is described in detail in another chapter. Father Doody had become the priest on T.I. and wrote on February 6th:

*“All the Sisters and children have gone down to Brisbane (Cooyar, near Toowoomba), from T.I. and all the women and children from Hammond have gone with them. As there were over ninety of them I thought it best to send Fr. Flynn along with them ...”* ... *“Hammond has been practically closed up – there are still about a dozen boys (men) over there, but they are nearly all working here in T.I. during the day...”*

And what happened to the Mission buildings during the war? We’re indebted to Elizabeth Burchill<sup>15</sup> for some insight into this:

*“Under military occupation the presbytery building became the orderly room and the convent was used as the officers’ mess. Nine-inch guns were pointed out to sea and although the weapons have long been removed the hilltop site is still [published, 1972] called Command Hill.”*

**The Courier-Mail**  
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1941  
10 PAGES—3d

**JAPAN STRIKES HARD AT PACIFIC BASES**  
**Bombs on Nauru, Singapore, Hong Kong: Fierce Hawaiian Battle**  
**ENEMY TROOPS LAND IN NORTH MALAYA**  
**Heavy Damage at U.S.A. Naval Key Points**

JAPAN has invaded Malaya and Thailand, and has attacked Singapore and Hong Kong. She has bombed Nauru and Ocean Island, close to the Australian Mandated Territory zone of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

This follows swiftly upon her treacherous and sudden attack on the great U.S. Naval base of Hawaii and the other American key points in the Pacific.

No official information has been received in Australia to indicate that the A.I.F. has yet been in action. Our troops are in southern Malaya.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Churchill) told the House of Commons yesterday that Cabinet had met at noon, and he had been authorised to make an immediate declaration of war against Japan. That declaration had been presented at 1 p.m.

Her bombers have done heavy damage to the U.S. sea and air bases in Hawaii and are reported virtually to have destroyed America's advanced base at Guam. Recent in the Philippines have been raided.

**AUSTRALIA TO DECLARE WAR: WIDE NATIONAL DECISIONS**

(Courier Mail, 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1941.)

<sup>14</sup> When years later on Hammond Island Mary very successfully grew an abundance of pumpkins, friends advised her to make a little money by selling them. No, she said. She had had her share of selling fruit and vegetables!

<sup>15</sup> *Thursday Island Nurse*, p.65.

## CHAPTER 12

### Thursday Island in the 1930s

In 1933 the celebrated author Ernestine Hill visited Thursday Island and wrote an account of what she saw. The reader may appreciate the opportunity of getting the feel for the society in which the Sisters and children lived and some of the influences that shaped their lives.

The facsimile is from the *Northern Standard*, (Darwin), Friday 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1933, p.11.

#### **VIGNETTES OF THURSDAY ISLAND'S PICTURESQUE SCENES**

##### **WHERE A HAPPY POLYGLOT PEOPLE SEEK FOR PEARL- SHELL**

(By Ernestine Hill in Sydney Sun)

Fourteen automobiles, 15 trucks, two motor-cycles, a couple of hundred bicycles, and one horse, all thrashing up and down upon less than five miles of made road—these provide the traffic problems for the Mayor and his eight attendant aldermen of Thursday Island, episcopal see and municipality in miniature, little white jewel of the Coral Sea.

Four times round the island and twice through the main street is considered a pleasant Sunday afternoon run, with perhaps a trip to the top of the garrison hill, to watch the sunset over the channels and islands.

Affectionately known from Townsville to Broome as T.I., this is the tiniest "city" in Australia. Homeport of a hundred little ships and three or four thousand polyglot Islanders, it is one of the smallest dots on the map of the immense archipelago between Cape York and New Guinea. Of its area of 845 acres, 280 are laid out in streets, built all of pearlsheil, figuratively speaking, for in 60 years of occupation the island has known no other industry.

There are six hotels, and, to offset them, six clergymen, three established churches, a convent, and the nuclei of a score of missions; three schools, one purely aboriginal, the others more or less mottled; a nine-hole golf course; and three tennis courts.

There are 12 organised societies, including a Chamber of Commerce, Freemasons', Oddfellows' and Bulaloos' lodges, a Country Women's Association with a week-end cottage a mile away on Prince of Wales Island, a Royal Geographical Society with 35 members, three football clubs, five cricket clubs, rifle, yacht, sailing, Japanese and Malay clubs, a racecourse, a talkie show, and the "Torres Straits Pilot," edited by the Mayor, the smallest daily newspaper in the world.

In the distilled sunlight of the streets, with their avenues of almond and weeping fig and light green coconuts, are the shaded shops of Cingalese jewellers and Japanese and Chinese merchants selling all that is quaint and delightful, from deftly-carved trifles of Australian pearl and tortoiseshell to dugong steak and long soup.

Along the foreshore, where the dinghies bring in great heaps of mother-of-pearl and bags of trepang, there is a constant procession of Islanders. Although Cape York is but a mist in the distance, 18 miles away, these people of the Torres Straits are intelligent, virile, a world away from the aborigine. Great husky young Apollos, with skins of burnished copper and mag-



nificent breadth of chest, they frequently wear but the scarlet lava-lava that is their hereditary dress.

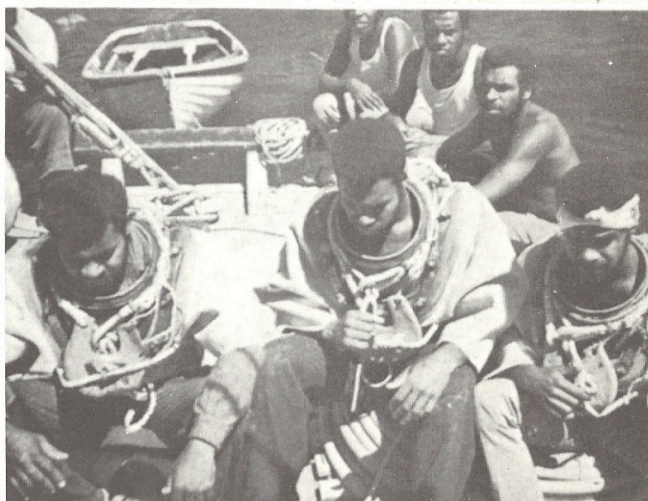
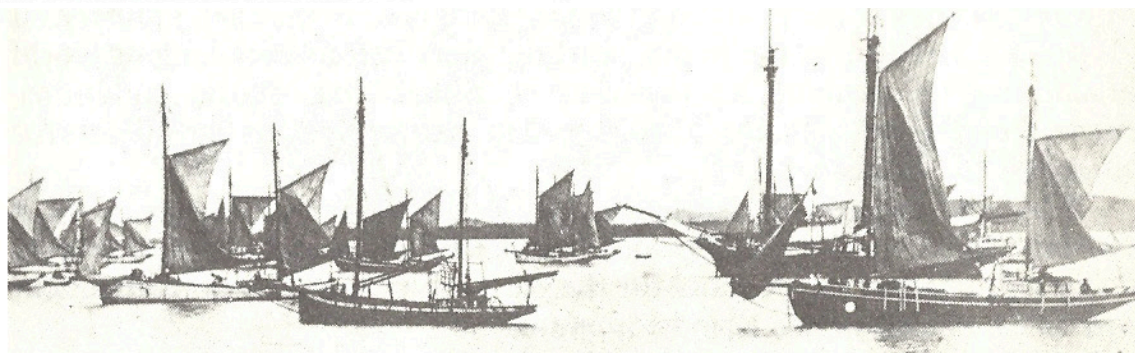
When the fleet is in at lay-up, many an island dance of the old head-hunting days rings the welkin at Thursday Island, to the swishing of the grass-skirts and the pulsing of the wooden drums.

For more than 30 years the annual revenue that the luggers brought to the miniature town was never less than £250,000. This year, with restricted fishing and pearl-shell lower in price than it has ever been in history, its income from 109 ships, fishing trochus and beche de mer as far south as Whitsunday Passage and pearling a radius of 100 sea-miles, tallies out at £135,000, employing 1500 men.

Nevertheless, there is never a case of dire poverty on the island, even among the humblest colored people.

The impression that all is well would be heightened by listening to the Thursday Island Town Band, polychromatic but full of harmony and vigor, playing upon the jetty on Sunday evenings.

Its members, in dapper uniform, are under the baton of a half-caste Cingalese conductor, and the strains of "Dixie" and other melodies are wafted across the Straits, none the less sweetly in that the ancestors of Solomon Salt, the bass drummer, blew the conch



(The above 3 photos are taken from Foley's *Timeless Isle*<sup>1</sup> and are captioned: "A fleet of pearling luggers moored in Port Kennedy harbour, circa 1930"; "Torres Strait pearl divers don their suits" and "A pile of trochus shell in a T.I. shed, circa 1930")

A different insight might be gained by the observations of Maud Keck and Olive Orbison writing in 1932.<sup>2</sup> After opening their descriptive narrative with the throw-away line, "... Thursday Island, that desolate guardian of the Great Barrier Reef," they continue:

<sup>1</sup> Pages 54 and 55.



*“They looked down on its [T.I.’s] broad and sandy street, lined with dead trees and checkered with tufts of stunted grass that paralleled the wide harbor for at least three blocks. They could see the post office and the barracks at one end, and the bravely spired Quetta Church at the other, and when Jim thought how government and religion buttressed a place which cared for neither he twisted his mouth wryly. Black men and yellow men lived here; Singhalese, pearl divers, beche de mer fishermen – adventurers of all sorts drifted and loitered for a time along this white beach or sauntered up the sandy street, or lingered in one of the many bars. Some of these men were waiting; Thursday has a drifting population. Somebody is always looking for a ship, a launch, a freighter or a recruiter.”*

These two authors allege a much darker side to life amongst some T.I. citizens in the late 1920s/early 1930s. They tease the reader, inviting imaginings of a sinister nature. Parts of Pages 49 and 50 are reproduced in facsimile.<sup>3</sup>

**THURSDAY ISLAND** 49

Jim Hatton was waiting; his straining eyes looked as if he had been waiting for something a long time. He was a tall, thin man with graying hair and a hard-muscled lean body. His aggressive high-bridged nose, restless eyes and firm—even grimly firm—mouth were set in a skin burned to a mahogany brown. He wore wrinkled white ducks and he looked like an outdoor man used to hardship and danger. When he met strangers he would turn suddenly and with a quick gleam of his eyes and a blue-white flash of his fine teeth he would look them over. Most people remembered that scrutiny. They thought he was an Australian but he was not. He had been born in one of those tall ugly houses with a high stoop and a basement that lined Eddy Street in San Francisco about fifty years ago. His people were British. When he was not talking to Scott now, his binoculars swept the town. Behind the one wide street

were iron shanties with red roofs and small irregular wooden cottages. They straggled up the bare slope toward Hatton’s house on the hill. At four o’clock the heat was infernal, little heat waves rose from the shanty roofs and dusty tropical vines hung with wilting tendrils to the wooden houses. He knew Thursday well. He knew what shabby secrets some of those vine-covered cottages hid or shamelessly revealed and there was a cynical light in his eyes as he watched them. He knew where openly or secretly the black sleep could be bought; the merchants in that traffic being Chinese whose dull eyes peered from mouldy little shops where faded bolts of cloth and cheap vivid china thinly disguised their business. For if life is too much for you in Thursday—and Hatton had seen more than one desperate white man give up the sorry task—death is cheap and easy. There is the “black sleep” or the “big-fellow sharks” or the rolling tides which keep their secrets.

### Coming of electric light, 1931

It was in October, 1931, that, “*Thursday island was illuminated with electricity*” for the first time, the power house being in Victoria Parade. Mayoress, Mrs. Corran, did the honours of formally switching on the current.<sup>4</sup>

### Rowdy behaviour

“An outrage” is a nineteenth and early twentieth century description of a fight or a disturbance. By the time we reach the 1930s there is still the occasional fight, especially, it seems, at Christmas time. A.F. Ellis was an “adventurer” and his book, “*Adventuring in the Coral Seas*” which was published in 1937<sup>5</sup>, surely refers to events he witnessed in the mid 1930s:

*“Thursday Island was celebrating. It was Christmas holiday season and the pearling-fleet of about three hundred luggers and their “mother ships” were in port, the crews spending their money and having a wild time. Free fights were numerous, some of the coloured people having long-standing feuds to work off. The jail was full and prisoners were chained to logs outside.*

*“A relatively small force of aboriginal police of the black-tracker type maintained law and order. We were impressed by their efficiency; miscreants among the coloured people dreaded them, apparently with good reason. Sometimes a crowd of rowdies would be seen quarrelling and brawling, most of them the worse for liquor. Suddenly a couple of barefooted black police would saunter along in a nonchalant manner. The effect was magical; like Longfellow’s Arabs, the brawlers would ‘silently steal away.’”*

**THURSDAY ISLAND PROGRESS.**

**THURSDAY ISLAND, October 8,**  
Thursday Island was illuminated with electricity on Wednesday night for the first time, the formal switching on of the current being carried out by the Mayoress (Mrs. Alex. Corran). The power house is situated on the site of the old quarry in Victoria Parade. The Mayor, in his address, pointed out that the installation had been completed without recourse to borrowing from the Government, at a cost of something over £5000.

<sup>2</sup> Keck, Maud & Orbison, Olive, *Thursday Island*, Ives Washburn, N.Y., 1932, p.48.

<sup>3</sup> The reference to the “black sleep” produced the following possible explanation from the internet: “East Indian drug, “nind andhera” (“the black sleep”), which induces a deathlike state of anesthesia.”

<sup>4</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1931.

<sup>5</sup> Ellis, A.F., *Adventuring in the Coral Seas*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1937, p.133.



### A contrary point of view

Published in 1930-31, Sir Maurice Yonge's *"A Year on the Great Barrier Reef"* leads us to believe that T.I. was quiet and law-abiding. He speaks of it having an *"air of quiet prosperity."*<sup>6</sup> After writing about the island's earlier reputation for lawlessness he declares: *"Crime is almost unknown and theft so rare that the doors and windows of houses are habitually left open during the indefinite absence of their owners."*



(The photo is from the National Library of Australia as posted on the net, and is said to be about this time ... end of 1920s, early 1930s. It is titled "Main Street")

A similar view was expressed at roughly the same time. Mr. A.F. Ploughman, former resident on T.I., is reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as saying, in 1932<sup>7</sup>, that the Depression had not caused obvious distress on the island, in spite of a number receiving Police rations, and that life was *"very monotonous."* He added, *"The chief entertainment was the Wednesday and Saturday night open-air picture show. Europeans*

**In prospect, Thursday Island appears to be a swarming, flaring town, like the wicked old Port Said. It turns out to be, however—so searching and firm are the fingers of Queensland law—a dull, orderly little place, with nothing more reprehensible than a highly respectable picture show to enliven its night life—an odoriferous hall, where Japanese, Chinese, Solomon Islanders, and Australian aboriginals eagerly follow the melodrama of cowboy life in America.**

*were charged 2/-, but the natives paid their sixpences squatted on the ground in front, and thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment."*

In 1939 another observer, Kinglsey Temple, from the *Sydney Morning Herald*<sup>8</sup>, finds T.I. *"a dull, orderly little place,"* and puts this down to the firm finger of the law. He notes that there was nothing more reprehensible happening than a *"highly respectable picture show."*

<sup>6</sup> Yonge, C. M., *A year on the Great Barrier Reef*, Putnam, London & New York, 1930/31, 163.

<sup>7</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> July, p.8

<sup>8</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> March, p.21.

## Native Affairs and Cornelius O’Leary



Longtime associated with the administration of the above-mentioned “Native Affairs” (and its former incarnation) on Thursday Island was Cornelius O’Leary, who had been married in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church on Thursday Island. And it would be well to recall his thoughtful and kindly contribution to this complex and controversial matter over the years of his control. When Deputy Director of Native Affairs [in 1960]<sup>9</sup>, Pat Killoran is reported thus:

*“A mighty man,” was the comment on O’Leary round the island.*

*“It was Cornelius O’Leary who worked out the procedure for a native council for each Torres Strait island,” said Killoran, “building it up from the authority of the old tribal chiefs. The idea was later taken up by the New Guinea administration of its village councils. It became law for Torres Strait in 1939.”*

We’ll later see, that at his retirement dinner, it was remarked that it was the first occasion that all people of all races had come together socially on an equal footing.<sup>10</sup>

## Discrimination

Most interesting descriptions of aspects of life on T.I. in roughly the 1930s are made in Thomas Lowah’s autobiography:<sup>11</sup>

*“Before I was born there were two primary schools, the State and the Roman Catholic. Discrimination, complaints, insults and disagreements against the black children in school provided a very good excuse for another to be built, which was named, The Aboriginal State School, commonly called (by the Whites) “Black’s School.” After completion of this school all black children were transferred to it (these children were not Roman Catholics).*

*“The blacks had a very raw deal. Their children were not allowed in the same school with the whites. They were not allowed in the swimming baths, dance hall nor were they even allowed to occupy the same seats in the theatre. What applied to the children also applied to the adults.*

*“The theatre in Thursday Island was an open air type. There were two entrances, one for the whites which led to the Gallery and canvas chairs, and the other for the blacks who paid less but had only wooden seats or stools to sit on. ...*

*“Hotels barred Aboriginal and Islanders and these people were only allowed into Thursday Island to see the doctor if they got ill. It was an offence for Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines of Australia to consume alcohol in pubs, this was an Act made law.”*



(The photos show the open-air cinema with images of the upstairs soft seats and the downstairs bench seats)

In corroboration of the above and to emphasise this matter of a “colour bar” on T. I. in the 1930s and prior to that, let us read this summary by Elizabeth Osborne<sup>12</sup>. Her research is based on numerous interviews:

*“[T.I. women] had little or no social interaction with the white elites. Their children were not allowed to attend the state school; a separate school for ‘coloured’ children had been set up in 1913 in response to white agitation. Whether they went to this school or the Catholic convent on Thursday Island, the children were ‘only*

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Rees, p.82.

<sup>10</sup> Flynn, Fr. Frank, M.S.C., *Northern Frontiers*, Devonshire Press, Surry Hills, undated, pp.184-5

<sup>11</sup> Lowah, Thomas, *Eded Mer (My Life)*, The Rams Skull Press, Kuranda, 1988, pp.30-31.

<sup>12</sup> P.17.



*allowed to go to grade five'. They were told they did not 'have the brains to go further ... That was it, if you have to leave school because of your colour. We weren't allowed to sit for scholarship.' An eighty-year-old woman recalled that they had had no say in their children's education: 'That time [the white authorities] don't have school meetings – we were not involved in school.' There were entertainments, which were also segregated. There were dances for whites only and the upstairs seats in the open-air theatre were reserved for them. If the 'bank boys' were caught associating with 'coloured' girls, they had to pack up and leave the island."*

(Further research and interviews are needed to verify or find error in Osborne's assertion that the "coloured" children were "only allowed to go to grade five" at the Convent school.)

## Airstrip

*"Before the war a light plane service operated from T.I. itself, connecting the island with Cairns – via several stops on the way. From 1936 onwards the aptly named North Queensland Airways Ltd flew a D.H. Dragon on this route. The plane landed on a short strip near present-day [1982] Tamwoy Town ..."*<sup>13</sup>

## Different (racial) groups keep apart

A feature of Thursday Island society before the Second World War was that while the community was multi-racial and there was little or no tension between separate groups, the different races kept to themselves and, indeed, there were roughly distinct areas where the Whites, Malays, Chinese and Japanese lived and worked. Ina Titasey, in her autobiography<sup>14</sup>, remembers that it was in the 1970s that these divisions, or "keeping apart", began to break down.

## The Islanders' Maritime Strike of 1935

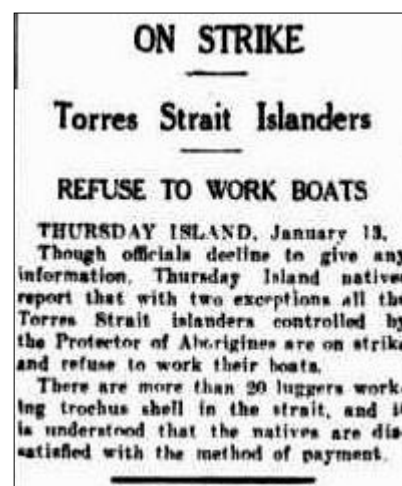
A very significant development occurred on New Years' Day, 1935<sup>15</sup>. Islanders organised a strike! While much could be written about this strike, suffice it to say here that it marked a dramatic step along the way towards equality of treatment in industry and in society. Mina Mir Lo Ailan Mun writes about the strike<sup>16</sup>

*"The two aspects of the introduced economy most resented by Islanders were forced labour and controls over their earnings. Nevertheless, Islanders remained enthusiastic about participation in the marine export economy (Bêche de mer, trochus and mother-of-pearl) because they saw it as a means of increasing their self-reliance.*

*Islanders resented government policies which denied their humanity and their desire to control their own livelihoods and futures. Resentment was so intense that on New Year's day 1936 they decided to strike.*

*The 1936 strike was the first time the Torres Strait Islanders had collectively organised in order to challenge European authority. Islanders had stood up and insisted on being treated with dignity and respect. The significance of the 1936 all-island maritime strike was the emergence of a regional*

*identity. The strike was not primarily about wages and conditions; rather it was about the Islanders' right to control their wages and their own affairs. In other words the strike was about equality and autonomy."*



## Political developments, 1937

"Self-Governing powers – For Aborigines – Torres Strait Islanders" is the heading in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1937.<sup>17</sup> The article tells of a visit of the Queensland Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. Hanlon, to the Torres Strait.

<sup>13</sup> *Timeless Isle*, p.71.

<sup>14</sup> As told to Cate Titasey.

<sup>15</sup> The newspaper extract headed, "ON STRIKE" is from *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1935, p.7

<sup>16</sup> *Proper communication with Torres Strait*, Department of Torres Strait and Islander Development. For a full treatment, see *Culture Clash in the Torres Strait Island: the Maritime Strike of 1936*, by Nonie Sharp, presented to the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, 1982.

<sup>17</sup> P.10.

"The natives, in effect, are to be given self-governing powers by the visting of power in the native councillors to authorise expenditure of money from the islands' funds, which the State Government has built up by the deduction of a percentage of the wages from divers in the pearling fleets."

Finch<sup>18</sup> explains:

"At Yorke Island in 1937, on 23<sup>rd</sup> August – now an annual public holiday in the Islands – the first major conference of all the Islands' Councillors was held. Following this conference, which suggested changes to previous legislation and amendments to some of the old Island laws, the first Torres Strait Islanders Act was passed in 1939. The Act provided for local government on each island. A Chairman and two Councillors, democratically elected every three years, were to be responsible for administering the new Island by-laws affecting the day-to-day life of the villagers."

## Bitumising

The Roads of T.I. remained dirt till 1938. A number of visitors mention dusty and sandy roads. In June, 1938 we learn of the bitumising of the road along Victoria Parade.<sup>19</sup>

"A gang of relief workers are employed, and Mr. Toppenburg is in charge." From a report we are to read later<sup>20</sup>, in 1950, this remained the only bitumenised road on T.I. till at least 1950.



## Lord Robert Baden-Powell's visit, 1934

It would have been a thrill for the Scouts amongst the children of Thursday Island to be in the welcoming party to meet the founder of the Scout's movement during his visit in 1934. The attached press extract is from the *Morning Bulletin* of December 17<sup>th</sup>, p.7.

**LORD BADEN-POWELL**  
**Arrival At Thursday Is.**

THURSDAY ISLAND, December 15.  
Astonishment was the first expression from the World Chief Scout, Lord Baden-Powell, when he stepped ashore from the *Marella* on Friday afternoon, for more than 300 Scouts, Guides and Rovers, white and coloured, greeted him in Scout fashion as the vessel neared the wharf, but his interest increased on his inspection at the cricket ground of natives from the other islands who had prepared a programme which could have been extended indefinitely, but the approach of sunset cut the demonstrations down to about an hour.

Lord Baden-Powell was given a welcome by the Mayor and a big assembly of citizens at the Town Hall immediately after landing, and an impromptu presentation of needlework from the natives at Napon to Lady Baden-Powell at the conclusion of the civic reception was the first of many gifts to the visitors, the natives of Burnley Island giving the Chief Scout a carved tottem stick of wongai.

The following article appeared in the *Courier Mail* of 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1939, p.4.

## NEGLECTED EDEN Thursday Island Possibilities

By A Special Correspondent  
AN American tourist recently declared that Thursday Island—"T.I.," so the knowledgeable call it—is a ghost island, and many have contended that this neglected outpost could be made a tourists' paradise.

This potential "Honolulu at our gates," as optimists have called it, has had attention before—chiefly of a highly critical order—but no one has troubled to do much about it.

Part of Queensland, it is known by little more than name to the rest of Australia, which is more than can be said for the rest of the Torres Strait Islands, which are not known at all—Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Goode, Horn, or Turnagain.

About 30 miles to the north-west of Cape York, Thursday Island is 1448 miles by sea from Brisbane. One and a half miles long by three-quarters of a mile wide, it is surrounded by seven islands.

First far northern settlement in 1863 was made at Somerset, about seven miles south of Cape York, but the anchorage was unsatisfactory, and in 1877 a transfer was made to Thursday Island, which became an important pearling station.

A fort was built, and native boys were brought from New Guinea and the Solomons, aborigines from around Cape York, Torres Strait Islanders, Japanese and Malays to work on the pearling luggers and schooners.

THE population to-day is somewhere about 1700, of whom about 500 are white. According to one observer "a visiting ethnologist calculated that all the peoples in the world were represented here—with 17 over."

In the early days, so it is said, the island was celebrated for the heavy drinking of its hard-bitten inhabitants; but to-day it has electric light, ice works, and various other amenities of civilisation.

Dominating the strait through which ships pass between Australia and Asia, it had a garrison until 1933, when it was transferred to Darwin.

The island to-day is the centre of the Queensland pearl shell industry. Its prosperity depends upon world markets for pearl shell, trochus, beche de mer, etc., for which it is the Queensland entrepot.

It is the administrative headquarters of the Anglican Diocese of Carpentaria and the Torres Strait Mission; among its sights is the cathedral originally built as a memorial to those drowned when the *Quetta* was wrecked on an uncharted rock off Albany Island on February 28, 1890.

rock off Albany Island on February 28, 1890. The vessel sank in three minutes and 133 persons lost their lives.

THURSDAY ISLAND has delightful scenery, plenty of tropical fruits and fish, no house flies, and few mosquitoes.

With that casual Australian attitude which, until only recently, has neglected the islands on the Barrier Reef and still largely neglects those northward, no one outside a few enthusiasts has taken the slightest interest in Thursday Island.

While the Americans are busy boosting Honolulu and the British the West Indies as holiday resorts, Australians remain largely indifferent to the possibilities of their own possessions.

<sup>18</sup> *The Torres Strait Islands*, p.49.

<sup>19</sup> *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, p.4.

<sup>20</sup> *The Courier Mail*, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1950, p.2.



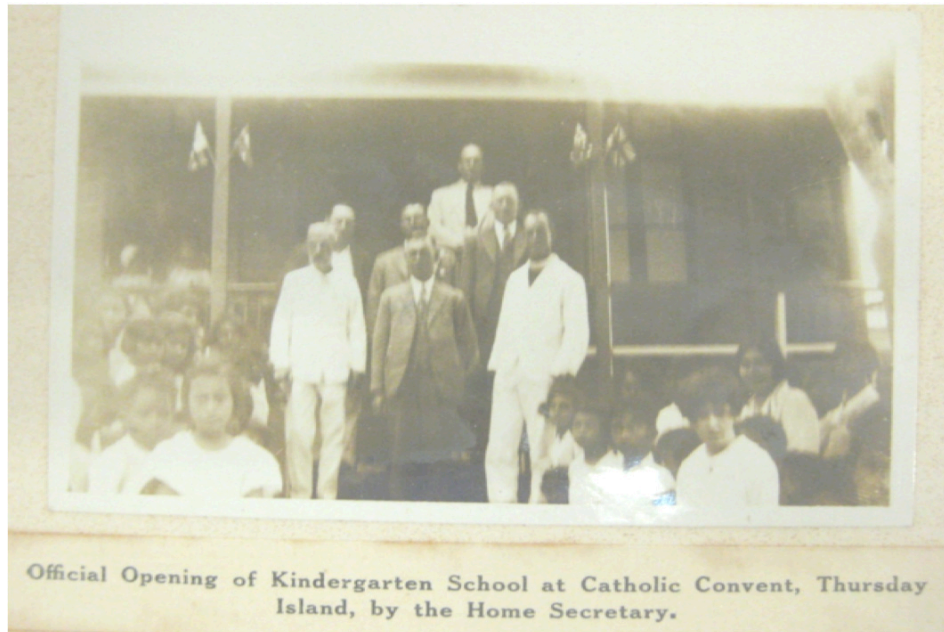


## CHAPTER 13

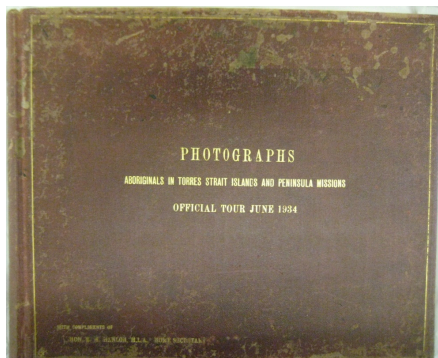
### Glimpses of the school, 1934-1937

#### Opening of Kindergarten, 1934

The photo shows the opening of the Kindergarten in 1934 during the Home Secretary's tour of the Islands of the Torres Strait. From descriptions of him the fellow in the white suit on the left is Alderman Alexander Corran, the Mayor and owner and editor of *The Torres Strait Daily Pilot*, mentioned earlier.



This photo is contained in an album of photos, located in the Queensland State Library, taken in June, 1934, to record the Home Secretary's visit to the Islands. Several other photos are here reproduced to show what Thursday Island was like in 1934.







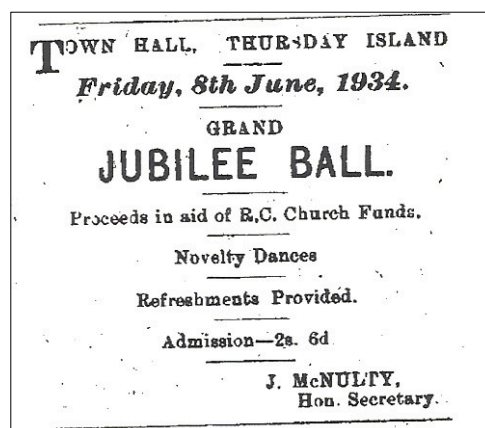
This “Official Opening” photo of the Kindergarten opening raises a number of questions. The photo is from an official album dated, June, 1934. However in other places a very similar photo is dated 1932<sup>1</sup>. While the guests of honour are in different positions in the two photos and the small flags are not exactly the same, it seems odd that one Kindergarten would be opened in 1932 and another in 1934.<sup>2</sup>

The other photo from the National Library of Australia, as posted on the net, is given the date of 1938 and the title “Infants’ School”.

### Jubilee of Sacred Heart Mission, 1934

To commemorate that it was fifty years since the beginning of the Sacred Heart Mission there were surely commemorative Masses and reunions of some of those who had been founding members, but records of such celebrations have been lost. Not lost, however, is an advertisement in *The Torres Strait Daily Pilot* of May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1934, of a “Grand Jubilee Ball” to be held in the Town Hall.

Notice that the “Hon. Secretary” is J. McNulty. It will be recalled that when the priests first arrived in 1884 they celebrated their first Mass at McNulty’s hotel, and most probably stayed there till the presbytery was built. And the careful reader would have noticed that at Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Sports Day a McNulty won a race!



### School Inspector’s Report on several regional schools, 1935

Mr. Inspector Rahmann’s Report on visiting the schools of the Far North of Queensland, including Thursday Island “(three schools)”.<sup>3</sup> As summarised in the *Cairns Post*, the Report was very general, commenting on the schools as a whole rather than reporting on individual schools. One remark of interest is: “*The average number of pupils on the roll per teacher at the time of the inspection was 33.3 in State Primary schools, and 23.1 in Denominational schools.*”

It’s not known how the following remarks might apply to the teaching of the Sisters, but they may help the reader get an insight into the nature of primary education generally at the time of writing. The press report continues:

*“It was felt that, though many teachers rely too much on published text-books and instruction sheets, with the result that teaching is mechanical and the child is expected to fit the machine and not the machine the child, yet most teachers do prepare and plan their own work to suit the needs of the classes.*

*The formal side of English is generally well treated. Where weaknesses exist, they are due to the absence of three main factors – progression in the teaching examples, revision based on weaknesses discovered, and appreciation of the possible range. Dramatisation is often too much the work of the teacher, and so originality and thought are not promoted. Appreciation tends to degenerate into comprehension.*

Once again there is comment on using stories from the children’s experience: “*Topics of simple every day interest are poorly done, while elaborately imaginative impossibilities are well done according to a set*

<sup>1</sup> Earle, Sandra J., *A Question of Defence: The Story of Green Hill Fort, Thursday Island*, Torres Strait Historical Society, 1993, p.52.. Also in the display at the Museum on Horn Island.

<sup>2</sup> Another suggestion is that one was an Infants’ School and the other a Kindergarten. The building in each photo appears to be the same building. Maybe by 1934 the Infants were being taught in another place.

<sup>3</sup> *Cairns Post*, 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1936, p.16.

pattern.” And the same applies to mathematics: *“It was repeatedly demonstrated how much greater interest can be aroused when problems on number are introduced, dressed in the garb of the every-day interests of the child.”*

Emphasis was given in the new syllabus of 1930 to speech. In reviewing his tour of many schools the Inspector remarks:

*“Speech training, as evidenced in the reading, recitation, and spoken work generally of the school only occasionally reaches a high level. Pride of speech should be developed. The work is made or marred in the preparatory grades. ... Rapid speech is fatal to clearness in nearly all cases.”*

And these general remarks were made with mainly English-speaking children in mind. How much more difficult was it for the Sisters with so very many pupils who did not hear Standard English in the home!

### The painting of the murals in the church, 1935



Residents on T.I. might understandably believe that the mural on the wall behind the altar has always been there. Not true. It was painted in 1935 by a young, local T.I. resident, David Sing. David was born on T.I. in 1911 and later, after spending a little time working in Innisfail, returned to Torres Strait where he spent three years assisting with teaching on Hammond Island.<sup>4</sup> Interested in art, music and painting he spent some time during 1935

painting the mural in the T.I. church. The children would have enjoyed watching the progress of the painting through the scaffolding that must have remained on the sanctuary for months.



David felt a vocation to one of the most austere Orders in the Catholic Church, the Carthusians, and joined them, being ordained in 1957. Except for a visit home to Australia to catch up with elderly family members, David lived out his life in various monasteries of his Order, mainly in France and Italy. He died in the Centenary year of the Sacred Heart Mission: 1984. Opinions differ as to whether David Sing painted the panels in front of the altar as some believe they are from another hand. The booklet, *125<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Years*<sup>5</sup>,



<sup>4</sup> *125<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, The on-going story of the Sacred Heart Mission, Thursday Island, 1884-2009*, p.22.

<sup>5</sup> Pub. 2009, p. 22.



following a sentence on David Sing's paintings, we read : *"The mural in Thursday Island Church, painted in 1935, still survives, as well as the work on the front of the altar."*



(Photos show David Sing (left) as a young man in charge of schoolchildren on Hammond Island in approx. 1930, and on the right in later years as a Carthusian monk)

The black & white photo of the wall prior to the painting of the mural shows that there was a previous painting. This image is taken from the very detailed Conservation Study by Michael Gunn Architects completed in 2000.<sup>6</sup> The "altar rail" is clearly seen in the foreground. This was standard in Catholic Churches before the Second Vatican council of the 1960s. It separated the sanctuary – the preserve of the priest and altar servers – from the congregation. There was a small gate in the centre. At Communion time everyone would kneel in front of this "Communion rail".

### The Sisters' finances, 1935

A revealing insight into the finances of the Sisters is contained in a letter Father Doyle wrote during 1935<sup>7</sup>:

*"Attending the school are about 120 children including the orphan girls (about 30) cared for by the Sisters. The Government gives a subsidy to the Sisters for 35 orphan girls at the rate of 10/- per week per girl. This grant is apid by the Government to the Sisters direct, By means of this Government Grant, -- 12 pounds, 10 shillings – per week, their sole income, the Sisters, seven in number, support themselves and over 30 orphan girls ranging from about 3 to 18 years of age. In consideration of this Government Grant and with the addition of the small sum of 5 pounds per month paid by the resident priest at Thursday island, the Sisters supply his meals, do his laundry as well as a good deal of laundry and other support for the priest and two Brothers at Hammond Island."*

### Mother Provincial's visit, 1936

Mother Mary Concepta, the Provincial Superior of the Sisters, visited on Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1936.<sup>8</sup> Mother Concepta had visited the Sisters, also, in Darwin and on Bathurst Island. She was accompanied by Mother Ursula of Kensington in Sydney.

Maybe in the recesses of the Sisters' archives is a report on Mother's visit. Imagine what she observed! Most assuredly she was impressed by the zeal of her Sisters in the conditions of the time.

### Inspector's Reports, 1936 and 1937

There were 100 children on the roll in 1936 with 94 of them in attendance at the time of Inspection in July.<sup>9</sup> There were four teaching Sisters. The positive reports given by Inspectors during the 1920s and into the 1930s continues with the report of the inspector in 1936:

<sup>6</sup> Michael Gunn Architects, *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church Conversation Study*, January, 2000, p.25.

<sup>7</sup> Deere, un-numbered pages.

<sup>8</sup> *Cairns Post*, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1936, p.6.

<sup>9</sup> Inspector G.C. Pestorius, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1936.

*“The control exercised by the teachers is of a good quality, being kind, sympathetic and firm. Children co-operate willingly, and interested endeavour is seen in all written work. Good training has been given in neat and tidy habits, and pupils were found to be fully polite in speech and action.”*

Inspector Pestorius noted the difficulty constantly experienced by the Sisters of some pupils advancing more quickly in their studies than others. He notes that mural decorations in the classrooms give a bright and cheerful appearance, and that there are many teaching aids. He repeats a remark mentioned by previous inspectors that some reading and recitation is too fast. He writes:

*“The cultivation of good speech is of major importance, and voice production appears to be capable of much improvement. Children speak, read, and recite far too rapidly; and expression and emphasis must be required even in lower classes. Much pattern reading on the part of the teacher and gifted pupils is recommended, and it is better to err for teaching purposes, by exaggerated emphasis and slowness, in the lower part of the school.”*

There is mention that in Grade VII Algebra is very Fair and Geometry is Good! And there are 240 books in the school library. There is also the first mention that *“Several coloured children attend daily from a neighbouring island,”* and also that *“Thirty (30) pupils are inmates of the neighbouring Catholic Orphanage.”*

Interestingly there is the note: *“Senior pupils are also taught Cardboard work, Chip Carving, and Cookery (for girl pupils).”*

A separate building is noted with approval in the Report of 1937 by Inspector D.S.A. Drain, whose arrival was mentioned in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* of 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1937<sup>10</sup>, It tells how a ship arrived,

*“bringing Mr. Drain, the school inspector, who had been doing several weeks inspection about New Guinea, and will now do the three schools here [Thursday Island], and thence proceed South ...”* He wrote:

*“A Preparatory section embracing the first, second and third half-years, is housed in a separate, well-ventilated building and is, in effect, a separate school. In the other building all grades from 1 to 7 are with the exception of Grade 5 represented. Accommodation, accordingly, is sufficient and comfortable.”*

The “new” school building is new to Inspector Drain, but would be the one opened in 1934. He notes that the staff consists of four Sisters. He makes an interesting observation or opinion on the relative abilities of white and coloured children:

*“... it must be said that the coloured children generally make a good showing in competition with their white confreres. Only when a child becomes conscious of its colour handicap is difference observed, such differences in most cases not being due to lack of existing ability..”*

It’s interesting to notice a remark about the Grade 7 students on completing their Grade 7 work:

*“G.7 consists of two sections: One boy and two girls who have all completed the Scholarship requirements are now devoting themselves to a Commercial Course, their test work from time to time being examined by a private southern college.”*

And finally for 1937 there is the remark that a New South Wales school newspaper is available and that four out of four candidates had gained Scholarships in 1936, their percentages being respectively 74, 62, 61 and 57. And the popular games of the time are vigaro and baseball.

## Beginning of school on Hammond Island, 1936

*“During 1935 a new convent was built on the [Hammond Island] Mission by Mr Vic McGrath and at the commencement of 1936 school year Sisters M. Laurencia and Dorothea went into residence and took charge of the school of 40 children. The arrival of the Sisters was the occasion of great joy to all on the Mission and resulted in a great improvement in the ‘tone’ of the Mission.”<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>10</sup> P.15.

<sup>11</sup> Short written history held at the Sisters’ Archives in Kensington, N.S.W.



## School life in the 1930s

Ina and Cessa Mills were children in the “Orphanage” in the late 1930s. They were by no means “orphans”! But as has been explained earlier the original “Orphanage” had developed into a “Boarding School” or “Hostel” and was the most convenient way of children from outer islands (Naghir in the case of the Mills sisters) being able to stay on Thursday Island and receive a good education. The following is a summary from a chat Brother Barry enjoyed with Ina and Cessa in 2011:

Besides the church, the convent and the presbytery where they are today, there was the “Orphanage” on the upper level (used as library till 2011 and subsequently demolished to make way for new school buildings) there were two school buildings at road level. Directly below the presbytery was the Infants’ School housing Classes 1, 2 and 3. The other school building was where the present [2011] Hall is and in it were classes 4, 5 and 6 with Class 7 on the verandah.



(Photo shows Ina and Cessa Mills as teenagers.)

Classes 4, 5 and 6 were not divided by walls so all the classes were in the one large room together.

The Sisters were remembered as strict with clear boundaries of where the children were allowed to be etc. When asked about punishments for transgressions the main one, for the boarders at least, was to be deprived of the Sunday walks which were relished for the freedom they gave from the strict confines of the school area during the week.

Religious instruction consisted of the Catechism which was to be learned off by heart (as was the custom Australia-wide) and the use of large coloured charts of pictures. Sister would display one of the pictures and then tell the story and explain from the picture. (This was a custom for teaching children in Sydney at roughly the same time. One picture the present writer remembers was of an angel guiding children over a rickety and gap-riddled bridge.)



Those in the boarding school all had chores. One was milking the goats while another was emptying the “night soil” for the pan that had been used in the dormitory during the night. Other chores included gathering fresh green twigs from nearby trees for the goats and gathering wood for the copper and the fuel stove. Regularly bread was baked and loaves were carried to the ramp on the northern side of the island to be taken to the boys on Hammond Island.

(Further chores are recorded by Ina Mills’ son, Martin, in an address he gave at a Conference<sup>12</sup>. He wrote:

*“My mother learned to read and write and do basic maths and received an education to, I think, Year four level. And of course she also learned to boil up the nuns’ habits and linen in the copper – to mend, starch and iron and scrub – to prepare food – to wait on priests at tables – to garden and milk goats – and so on.”)*

Cessa Mills felt she could detect the smell of goats in the milk which went with the morning porridge and greatly disliked it. Ina on the other hand liked goat’s milk and enjoyed scooping a little of the cream from the top.

Meals for the boarders were not remembered with pleasure. At lunchtime they had sandwiches, “Or not really sandwiches! They were just slices of bread with some jam or treacle smeared on them. They were put out under the corner of the convent. By the time we got them the topping had seeped into the bread, but we ate them because we were hungry.”

<sup>12</sup> *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, November 1993, p.55, Paper entitled “An Islander’s story of a struggle for ‘better education’”

Other activities were gathering kapok then separating the seeds from the kapok and making cushions or soft toys, eg. rabbits, and filling them with kapok. These were then sold at the Fete. It must be remembered that in these days, the 1930s there were very few roads and the surrounding area was just bush with the occasional walking track.



Another task was to sit on the tank near the church and polish the brass candlesticks and vases.

At 6.00am in the morning and at 6.00pm in the evening the Angelus bell would sound and it was the custom that whatever the children were doing they were to drop to their knees wherever they were to say the Angelus. Sometimes the girls were up before the Angelus bell to go about their chores.

As mentioned, the Sunday Walks were greatly treasured as they represented freedom! It was remembered that at Bach Beach there lived a German fellow who had a beautiful custard apple tree. Picking a ripe custard apple was an excitement-filled adventure as the owner would appear with a rifle and shout that he would shoot them if he could as they scampered away. The girls were always accompanied by one of the Sisters but would hurry ahead and pinch the custard apples before Sister caught up.

The Sisters' Convent consisted of two music rooms at the front with a verandah running between, a corridor running from the front door to the back with rooms on the church side for an office and one for the Mother-in-charge and a recreation room. On the Green Hill side there was a chapel for the Sisters and their dining room and beyond those rooms the bedrooms for the Sisters, divided, not by walls, but by curtains "like in hospitals." On the back verandah facing the hill and Boarding house was another "spare" room on the church side that opened out onto an outdoors sitting area for the Sisters.

Past the Green Hill side of the back verandah was a landing that led to the kitchen and the fuel stove. This building was close to the steep wall.

There were chooks between the back of the Sisters and the Boarding school though the eggs were for the Priest and the Sisters, not the children. The goats were in the same general area but further on the Green Hill side.

The Sisters taught piano and violin (and maybe clarinet) to private students to gain a little extra income. Their habit was blue and white with the white coverings around the head and neck. While the "day" students in the school did not wear a school uniform the boarding girls had a uniform of white blouse and dark tunic. They can be seen wearing this uniform in some of the early photos.

Much more detail of days at the "Orphanage" can be gained from Cate Titasey's Biography of Ina Mills [Titasey] when it is published.

Bonnie Sabatino recalls the girls from the "Orphanage" enjoying sliding down the handrail leading from the convent down to the school at Douglas Street level. Sister would clap and reprimand the girls, declaring that such behavior was "not lady-like". While recalling schooldays as happy days Bonnie also remembers greatly disliking the ironing on a long table on the back verandah of the convent and the polishing, on hands and knees, of the sanctuary of the church.

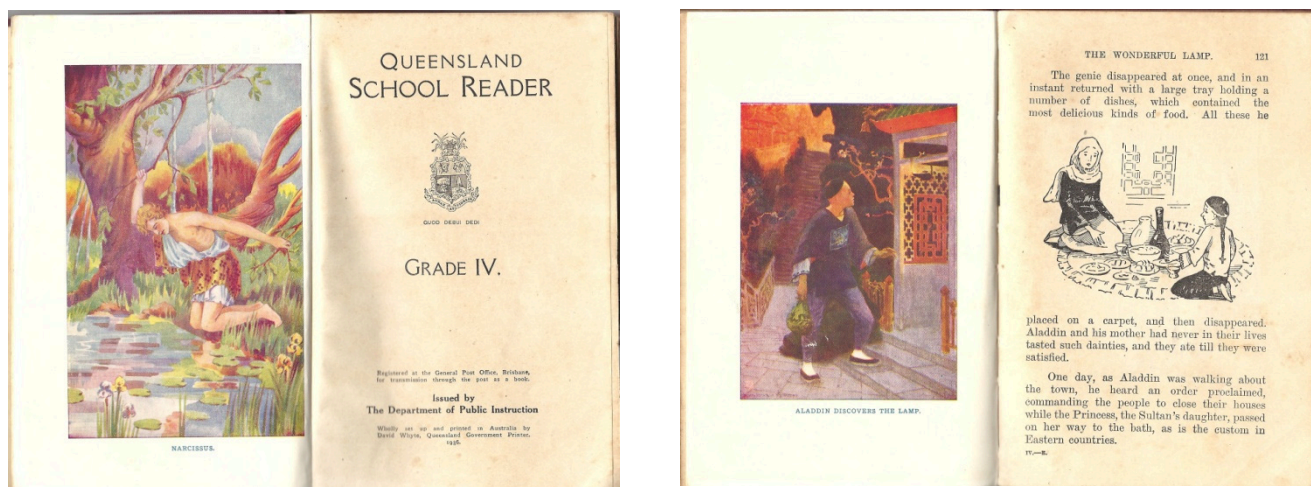
For others, similar unpleasant memories predominate. Monica Gould told of hating life at the "orphanage". Interviewed in approx. 2000<sup>13</sup> she said:

*"We boarded at the convent with lots of other girls. I boarded at the convent night and day – I hated it. We worked very hard. We were on our hands and knees scrubbing the wooden floors and verandahs of the presbytery with a scrubbing brush. We used to do the washing in a wood copper, turning a huge handle for the nuns' habits and the priests' habits and vestments. The senior girls starched and ironed the nuns' veils. After I went to the convent to board to go to school, Mum and Dad shifted to Horn Island, and we just went home for school holidays."*

<sup>13</sup> Shnukal, A., Ramsay, G., Nagata, Y., *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*, Pandanus Books, Canberra, 2004, p.282.



## Readers and European culture



It is presumed that the *Queensland School Readers* were used at Sacred Heart School since they were mandated in the English Syllabus of 1930. They began being published in 1915 and the above facsimiles are from a 1936 edition. While there were always European children at the school and the contents of the Readers were pitched to a European/Australian audience, it may be thoughtful to reflect on the impact of this content on the children of other backgrounds. *Alladin* would have been a pleasant novelty for the children of Asian parentage!

It's interesting to recall the observation of the Inspector<sup>14</sup> as far back as 1911 that,  
*"These schools suffer from the common defect of having English reading books, prepared for children under surroundings widely different from the ambient of children in Torres Straits. Thus the lessons often refer to things that these children have never seen, instead of having as their subject nature objects of their own latitude."*



(Photo of the "Orphanage" sent by the OLSH Sisters' Archives in Rome)

<sup>14</sup> Letter, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1911, Letterhead Government House, Brisbane.

## CHAPTER 14

### The Year 1938

The year 1938 is special in the history of the school through the tragic drowning of Sister Marietta Roche, illnesses suffered throughout the Island community, the Inspector's Report for 1938 and the coronation celebrations, the Farewell to Father John Doyle and the annual picnic. In 1938 there were 90 children on the school roll. To record each event in chronological sequence we will begin with the Farewell to Father Doyle.



#### Farewell to Father John Doyle

As can be seen from the newspaper extract, Father Doyle had been on T.I. for 11 years, starting just before the Great Depression. One of his great works was conceiving the idea of the Hammond Island Mission and seeing it through, with the help of Father Owen McDermott, to establishment. The children of the school would have known Father Doyle very well, and the 1938 children would have added to the Farewell entertainments.

**THURSDAY ISLAND NOTES.**  
**THURSDAY ISLAND, January 22.**  
 A public farewell to Rev. Father Doyle, who has been recently transferred, was held in the Town Hall on Friday evening, the 14th. A great crowd of Thursday Island citizens assembled to do their part in making the evening a success, and speeches were given by the ministers of each church, and several old acquaintances. Singing and recitations also formed part of the entertainment, and after the presentations had been made, the dance proceeded and carried on till midnight. Father Doyle has been here some 11 years, and will be greatly missed for his popularity and good work amongst his people here, and also on the Hammond Island mission. He leaves by the Taiping for Sydney.

#### Coronation celebrations, 1938

The whole of Thursday Island joined in celebration of the king's coronation in 1938 as can be seen by the photos displayed. Patriotically the Convent School entered a float entitled *British Empire*.

It would be marvellous to be able to find the original photos as reproduced here from "Timeless Isle". Note one is of the school children gathering and another is of the Convent float.



Presumably the children were told what it was all about and a number of them would surely have assisted with the preparation of the float, and others would long remember being on or beside the float

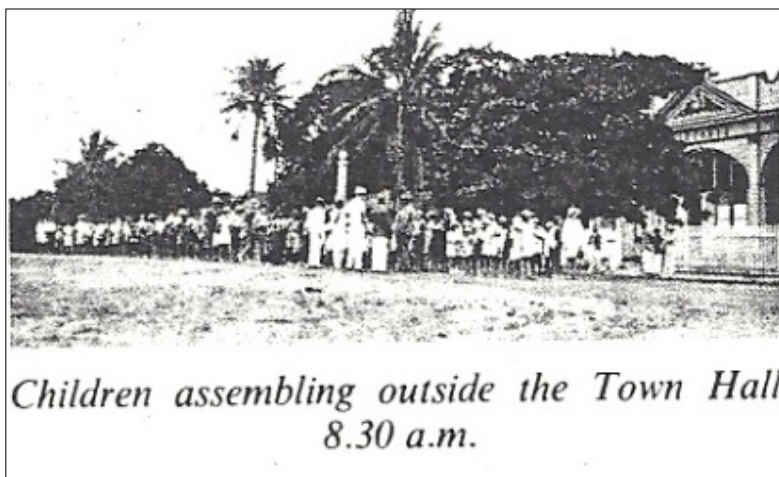
Quite probably, also, each child would have been presented with a medal commemorating the coronation. The one reproduced here would have been similar to any presented. The reader may be amused to return to Ch.5 and read of the hullabaloo at the time of the presentation of medals celebrating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.



*Convent School float, entitled British Empire.*

(The photos of the float and that of the children assembling are taken from Capt. J. Foley's *Timeless Isle*, p.63.)





### Sickness sweeps the Island (including children)

*"THURSDAY ISLAND, June 3 This year so far seems to be Thursday Island's unlucky one, sickness has been lasting since December. First dengue fever came and went then whooping cough took its place and became rather serious among the children, the three schools having to be closed for a few weeks at different intervals and several adults were also affected with it, but now this has practically passed over, an epidemic of 'flu has swept over the Island and very few have been fortunate to escape it, whole families and the staff of all firms and offices have been down at the same time."*<sup>1</sup>

### Inspector's Report, 1938

Inspector E. Walton visited the school on the 20<sup>th</sup> September. He notes that there are four teaching Sisters but suggests that the grouping of children in the younger grades could be rationalised so that there were fewer, making it easier to administer. He remarks on the "large proportion" of coloured children and notices that the average age for each class level is higher than generally. He finds fault with the learning of the "Tables" which, he says, *"are not well known, and much table drill is required in order to strengthen the children's knowledge of essential tables."* Vigaro and baseball are still the popular games, as they were in 1937.

Two of the three pupils in the 1938 Grade VII class were nominated for the Scholarship examination. (And we learn in the Report for 1939 that one was successful.)

Shortly we will read the tragic story of the drowning of one of the Sisters, so let us gain an insight into the atmosphere of school life in 1938 that she would have contributed to:

*"The children are polite and well-behaved, and they work industriously and dependably. They are attentive during instruction, and response is active and willing. The children appear to be happy in their school environment and they show a pleasing interest in their school work."*

### Fun and Games before tragedy, September.

Sister Marietta would have had a big hand in organizing the annual picnic described in the accompanying press article.

The picnic was held at Hammond Island on 28<sup>th</sup> September, roughly three weeks before the tragic evening of 17<sup>th</sup> October. Sister Marietta would have been in the thick of *"all manner of sports and amusements."*

#### THURSDAY ISLAND NOTES.

THURSDAY ISLAND, October 3.

The Convent School annual picnic was held on Tuesday, 28th, and the Q.G. Melbidir, and Burns Philp launch Wyben were kindly given for the occasion. They were taken to Hammond Island where the Catholic Mission has been established, and all manners of sports and amusements were held for the entertainment of the kiddies, which is a great joy to everyone of them, and the one event of the year always eagerly looked forward to.

<sup>1</sup> Townsville Daily Bulletin, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1938, p.4.

## Drowning of Sister Marietta, October, 1938

### NUN DROWNED IN CAPSIZE Thursday Island Tragedy

THURSDAY ISLAND, Monday.—Sister Marietta, 22, of the Sacred Heart Convent, Thursday Island, was drowned last night, when a dinghy sank in about 12ft. of water.

Sisters Marietta and Baptiste and Mrs. Jacobson were being rowed out by two mission boys to the launch Albany, to return from Hammond Island mission to Thursday Island, about 9.30 p.m.

Mrs. Jacobson and Sister Baptiste and the two boys kept afloat until a second dinghy from the shore rescued them, but Sister Marietta sank, and her body was not found until later.

Attempts at resuscitation failed. Sister Baptiste and Mrs. Jacobson were admitted to the Torres Strait Hospital.



(The press report is from the *Courier Mail*, 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1938, p.3. The article says Sr. Marietta was 22, whereas, in fact, she was 25)



Let Elizabeth Burchill, the “*Thursday Island Nurse*”, tell the story briefly:

“At 9p.m. one evening Francis Durante was rowing three women out to the Little Flower. Before the dinghy reached the launch that would take them back to T.I., a sudden, big wave rushed over the dinghy and threw them all into the water. One young woman, a teaching nun from the convent, was drowned. Francis rescued the other two and was subsequently awarded the Royal Humane Society Medal for bravery.”<sup>2</sup>

In this beautiful family photograph Eileen Roche (Sister Marietta) is sitting alone at the extreme left as you look at the photo.

She was born on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1913, and was baptised Eileen Agnes Roche and was the beloved daughter of Michael and

Hanorah Roche of Danderoo, Queensland, where she lived for twenty-one years.

Sister Marietta’s sister, Bridie Roche, told Brother Barry in August, 2011, when she was 95 years of age, how she understood the story. She also wrote a short account of Eileen’s – Sister Marietta’s -- short life and they are drawn on here to help tell the story.

<sup>2</sup> Burchill, p.66.



Soon after Eileen entered the Convent, Bridie recalls, she wanted to go home. But before her final profession she was sent to T.I. Maybe that was to take her mind off leaving the convent.

Bridie says, *"She was very, very happy"* and at another time mentioned, *"She absolutely loved the children"*.

Eileen (Marietta) was a good cook. She had cooked in the home before joining the Sisters and at the time of the tragedy of her death the men were building a windmill on Hammond Island and Marietta went over to do some cooking for them.

Bridie says that it was about midnight (but accounts differ) when they planned to cross back to T.I. and Marietta wanted to go that night because there was school the following day. She said, *"we must go back to be ready for school."*



The way Bridie tells it, it was Marietta herself who urged that they go. Other accounts say that the priest urged that they travel against the advice of the locals. Bridie says that a reliable dinghy had been taken back to T.I. earlier in the day and one that had not been used for some time was pressed into service to take the Sisters to the larger vessel for the short journey to T.I. This dinghy-come-lately leaked and took on water and capsized. Marietta was not able to be rescued.

But Bridie has another story of possible survival. When Marietta was taken from the water the natives tried to revive her in the way that they knew. But the priest came over and said that that was not the way to do it. Bridie believes that had

the natives continued with their way she may have survived.

Bridie concludes her account this way, *"Her body was returned to T.I. where her loving and loved pupils, including the beautiful Mills sisters, kept a prayerful vigil for the rest of the night and the next day. She was buried that evening in T.I. cemetery – bodies could not be kept for long in that climate."*

Bridie notes, *"Her grieving parents and family, so sad and heart-broken, were unable to attend her funeral as time did not permit that long journey."* But, *"Sister Marietta will always live in the hearts of all her loved ones."*



Over the years different family members have visited T.I. and have been shown her grave, where her happy, kind and generous nature has been fondly, but sadly, recalled.

In the *Parish Notes* of Danderoo Parish of November 1938<sup>3</sup> we read:

*“As a member of the Emu vale Catechism Class ... she is remembered as “Eileen Allannah” on account of her model obedience and the graceful charm of childhood. No one wondered when she devoted her young life to the welfare of the friendless on the Mission field. ... Every fortnight her fond parents drew the fruits of happiness and consolation from her happy letters coming from the mission fields back to the home of her childhood.”*

We can only speculate how the remaining Sisters consoled the children and their parents, and maybe haltingly attempted to answer questions that usually arise at the time of the death of a young and good person, about death and God’s providence. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries schools engage grief counsellors in such tragic circumstances. But in 1938 many were left to their own devices in harbouring the pain of their grief, before its easing with the passing of time.



*Funeral procession of Sister Marietta Roche who drowned on October 16th 1938 between Hammond and Thursday Island.*

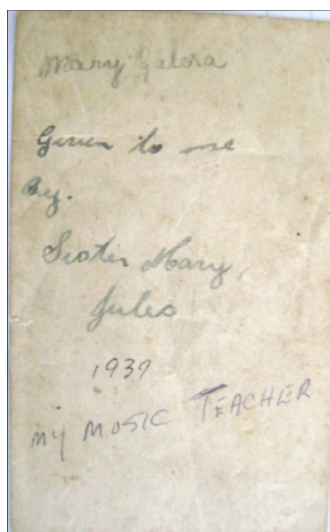
<sup>3</sup> St. Mary’s Parish Notes, November, 1938, pp.9-10.





## CHAPTER 15

### The School, 1939-1941



It was common in Catholic schools for children to be given “Holy Cards” for various things: to commemorate a special occasion or as a small prize for some achievement.

The accompanying picture of Our Lady is such a card, and in 2011 Mary Bowie -- Mary Galora when she was a child -- still had this card from Sister



Jules in her prayer book on the table beside her chair ... 72 years after she received it. (Photo, Sr. Jules)

#### Inspector's Reports, 1939, 1940 and 1941

The Inspector visited the school in 1939 just over one month after the beginning of the War in Europe.<sup>1</sup> He noted that the children were grouped into nine “classes” and taught by four Sisters.

There was only one student in Grade VII (the final year of Primary School) who throughout the year was concentrating on the study of Commercial Subjects with the intention of securing a suitable position after leaving school.

The observant reader will have noticed that the learning of the Time Tables was said to be deficient in the Report of 1938. But the inspector in 1939 remarks:

*“The Time Tables are suitable. Suggestions made during the previous visit have been carried out, and classes have now been effectively grouped for work in most of the oral subjects.”*

A little further insight into teaching and learning in 1939 may be gleaned from the following:

*“METHODS:-- Lesson matter is prepared regularly, and daily work-programmes are constructed by each member of the teaching staff. The teachers are earnest and conscientious, and the work of the pupils is well supervised. Methods are sound and are applied energetically. While oral expression is of a quite satisfactory standard among the senior and junior pupils, clearer speech and a generally more attractive form of expression should be aimed for in the middle section of the school. Current work was, on the whole, well known, and the improved results secured in revision tests indicate that previously-taught work receives due attention.”*

Inspector Walton also remarks that the school library is well used.

The same inspector returned to visit the school in September, 1940, when the roll is recorded to be 85 children. There remain nine classes taught by four teaching Sisters “whose work is capably supervised by the Sister-in-Charge.”

In considerable contrast to the favourable estimation of the ability of “coloured children” given by Inspector Pestorius in 1936, Inspector Walton makes the following judgement:

<sup>1</sup> Inspector E. Walton, 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1939.



*"Grading is, on the whole, suitable, but there are lagging pupils, especially in Grades IV and III. In some cases most of the children are coloured, and here the standard of general proficiency is not as high as it is in those grades which contain a fair proportion of children of British extraction. In this connection, it is quite clear that many of these children will be unable to reach Grade VI before school-leaving age is attained, for, although Grade V contains one (1) promising girl, most of these coloured children do not possess the necessary ability to ensure annual promotion to higher grades."*

**NATIVE CHILDREN WIN MANY PRIZES**  
Queensland aboriginal and Island (Torres Strait) children won most of the awards of the Aboriginals' Uplift Society (Victoria) in the John Batman essay competition for 1940. The Minister for Home Affairs (Mr. Hanlon) has been advised that they took four of the nine cups and nine of the 12 medals. In addition, five of the seven special prizes for native schools, which did not win cups or medals, were awarded to children in Queensland schools.  
The Queenslanders in the list are:—  
**Cups.**—Ina Mills and Monica Walker (Convent, Thursday Island), Dorothy Gaston (Purga, Ipswich), Topsy (Aurukun, Gulf of Carpentaria).  
**Medals.**—Nolan Baker (Monamona), Flora Mosby (York Island, Torres Strait), Slattery Mosby (Yam Island, Torres Strait), Bluebell Punjaub (Domadgee, North-west Queensland), Rebecca Atu (Mabulag Island, Torres Strait), Peseka Tumeua (Saibai Island, Torres Strait), Lassie Apuita (Badu Island, Torres Strait), Willie Blackman (St. Michael's School, Palm Island), and Adeline Butrie (Yarrabah, Cairns).

Congratulations were clearly due to Burgess, I., and Ifwersen, M. (The press extract telling of these results is from the *Cairns Post*, Monday 30<sup>th</sup> June, p.8.)

The only other matter of special interest in the Report of 1940 is the mention of the senior pupils giving *"an attractive display of Flag Drill."*

Acting District Inspector H.G. Watkin inspected the school in July, 1941. He canvassed some ideas on the separation of the children according to ability, virtually based on race. The reader must prepare for the racial preconceptions of the inspector. This is what he suggested:

*"Few of the coloured children are mentally capable of proceeding beyond Grade IV, and the progress of the white pupils is retarded by association with the slower native children. It is suggested that the coloured section of the school work to the Syllabus for Torres Strait Children, and that the white children either be worked as a separate unit in the building at present occupied by the Infant School, or worked with the coloured children and accelerated frequently until they reach Grade V. or the equivalent standard in the Native syllabus.<sup>4</sup> By this latter method, only the white and the oriental pupils would be taught beyond the Grade IV. of the ordinary syllabus."*

Almost certainly Inspector Walton is referring to Ina Mills, originally from Naghir Island, when he mentions that there is *"one promising girl"* amongst the coloured children in Grade V. Ina had developed a love of reading<sup>2</sup> and had a poetic way of seeing things. She entered the John Batman essay competition in 1940, awarded by the Aboriginals' Uplift Society (Victoria) and, along with Monica Walker, won a cup.

(The newspaper extract is from *The Courier Mail*, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1941, p.10.)

The cup, however, fell into disrepair through the salty atmosphere on Naghir Island, and disintegrated.<sup>3</sup> But Ina's lively spirit lived on for another seventy plus years; and her biography reflects her keen observation and narrative powers shown so long ago in her pre-teen years.

There were also good results in Book-keeping and Typewriting in 1941.

**EXAMINATION RESULTS**  
**SHORTHAND AND BOOKKEEPING**  
Following are the results of students who sat from northern centres for the examinations of the Queensland Shorthand Writers and Bookkeepers' Association conducted at the beginning of this month.

St. Gabriel's School, Charters Towers (shorthand speed—50 words per minute): Sorensen A., Pratt M.  
O.L.S.H. Convent, Thursday Island (bookkeeping—stage I): Burgess I., Ifwersen M. Typewriting—junior: Burgess I., Ifwersen M.

<sup>2</sup> Told in conversation with Brother Barry in May, 2011, and confirmed in the (as yet – 2011 – unpublished) Biography compiled from interviews by Cate Titasey)

<sup>3</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry.

<sup>4</sup> It would be interesting to find this "Native Syllabus."

In spite of these comments, Inspector Watkin urges the pupils be encouraged to attain higher standards:

*“It is suggested, however, that aims be made more definite, and that a minimum amount of work be taught to the higher standard. With the coloured section in particular, oral and written expression are considered of primary importance. In all written tasks, higher standards should be set, and the neat and orderly arrangement of work kept constantly in view.”*

The Report concludes with the observation that singing *“is robust and tuneful, and is thoroughly enjoyed by the children”*, and that one pupil was successful in the 1941 Scholarship Examination.

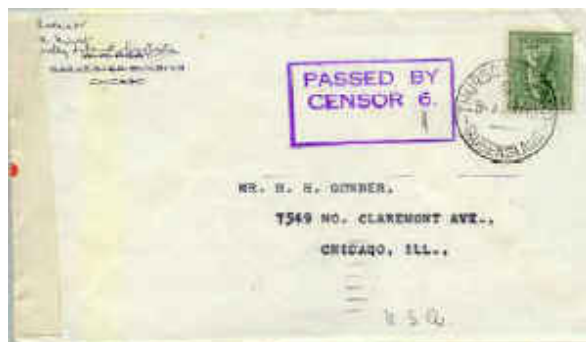
## War preparations

Impacting on the children and their families at this time were war preparations. Children would have been asking questions about the obvious influx of troops in 1940 and 1941, and talk of war would have been very much in the air. Fathers and brothers of some of the children would have enlisted. Men in uniform would have been all over the island, and especially in the main street, not far from the school. The following brief summary is taken from the brochure that accompanies the “Garrison Town Tour” conducted by Vanessa and Liberty Seekee:<sup>5</sup>

*“The early months of WW2 did not have much impact on Thursday Island. However, by June 1940 the Australian government began completing files on all Japanese nationals, with a view for a quick internment, should Japan enter the war. The first change for Thursday Island signifying that the war was approaching steadily closer, was the arrival of troops on the island. On the 2 December 1940, detachments of the Royal Australian Engineers, Royal Australian Artillery and the Australian Army Service Corps disembarked from the H.M.A.S. Zealandia onto Thursday Island. A 4.7 inch gun and searchlights were installed on Milman Hill in December, 1940.”*

Most probably the school children would have seen the searchlights in action sweeping across the clouds in testing and training for real plane spotting.

The letter pictured, postmarked Thursday Island, and dated during 1941, shows another reminder of the war ... letters being censored before being allowed to leave Thursday Island!<sup>6</sup> And a PUBLIC NOTICE in the *Torres Straits Daily Pilot* of Wednesday, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1941, told of artillery practice for the following day from Tucker Point between 9 a.m. and 12 noon, and then on the day after that from Milman Hill between 9 a.m. and 12 noon. If the Sisters were like teachers generally, on hearing the artillery fire, they may have said something like: *“There’s nothing to get excited about. Just go on with your work!”*



A most dramatic turn of events in the tiny township of Thursday Island occurred immediately after the sudden Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941, famously declared to be, by President Franklin Roosevelt, as *“a date which will live in infamy”*. *“The Japanese community of Thursday Island were interned in the area of Yokahama”*<sup>7</sup> [across Douglas St. from the Post Office], and barbed wire constructed around the area.”<sup>8</sup> The reader might imagine the questions the children would have been asking the Sisters about the barbed wire and the virtual imprisonment of the Japanese who had previously been ordinary free citizens of the community.

The attached letter on the letterhead of the Prime Minister of Australia of April, 1941,<sup>9</sup> paved the way for the enlistment of many Torres Strait Islanders into the Australian Army. Fathers and elder brothers of pupils at

<sup>5</sup> Torres Strait Heritage, *Garrison Town Tour*, Thursday Island, (issued 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Turnbull, James, W., *The Postal History and Postal Markings of Thursday Island*, Melbourne, Royal Philatelic Society of Victoria, 1990. Taken from posting from this booklet on the net.

<sup>7</sup> This was the T.I. nickname for the area at the eastern end of the Douglas St. shops and residences and which included the Japanese Clubhouse.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Seekee, Vanessa and Liberty,

<sup>9</sup> Displayed in the Thursday Island Museum at the Green Hill Fort.



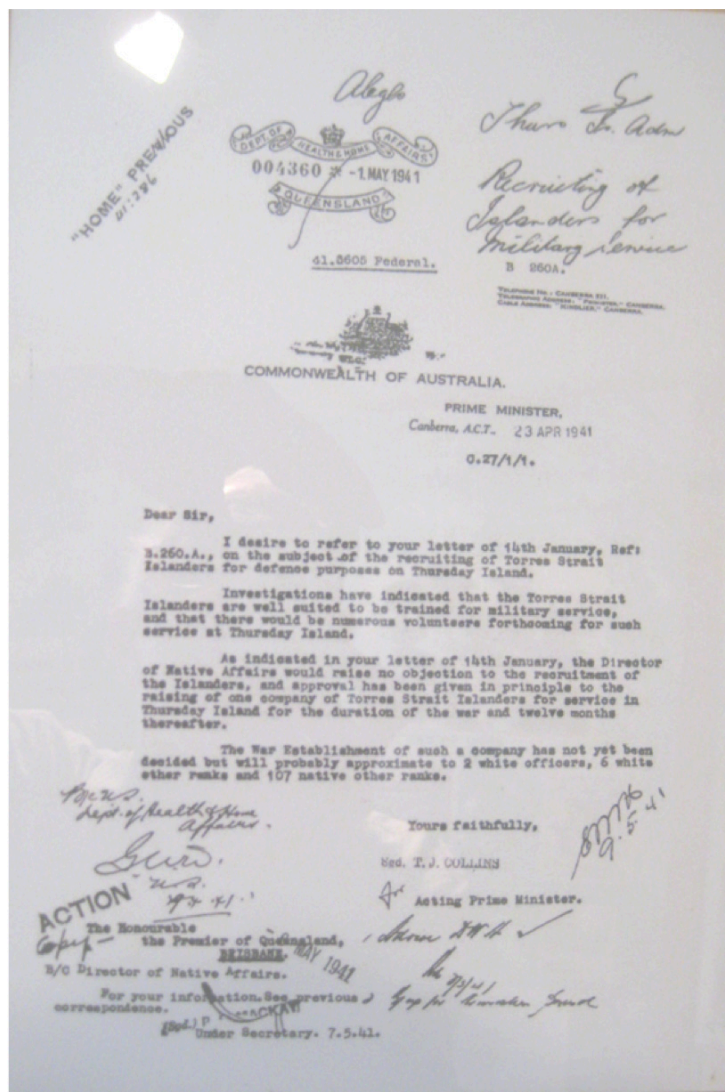
Sacred Heart School would surely have been amongst those who enlisted. The war would have touched many, if not all, families.<sup>10</sup>

Early 1942, as we shall see in the next chapter, was to affect all in a most devastating way!

## Islander recruits

*"More than 800 Torres Strait Islander men voluntarily joined what became the Torres Strait Light Infantry*

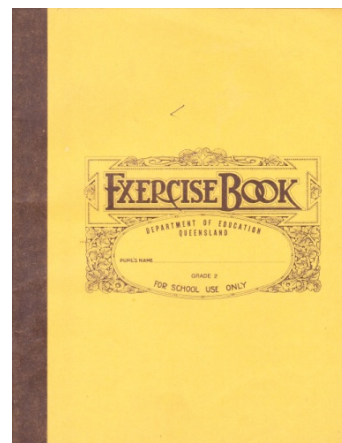
*Battalion, the only indigenous battalion in the history of the Australian Army. Thirty-six men died while on active service but, remarkably, it was not until the 1980s that soldiers finally received full back pay for their war service to the nation."*<sup>11</sup>



## Readers and Exercise Books

In the Queensland State Archives there is mention regarding the School for Coloured Children that "Little Readers 1 and 2" are in use in 1941. These readers, which most probably would also have been used at the Convent school, had not been found at the time of writing, 2011.

And the Queensland Department of Education Exercise Book (found amongst the School archives) would bring back memories for a lot of children from those times.



<sup>10</sup> This is a suitable field for research.

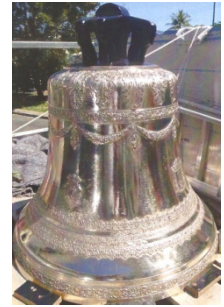
<sup>11</sup> *Torres Strait Islands*, p.218.

## CHAPTER 16

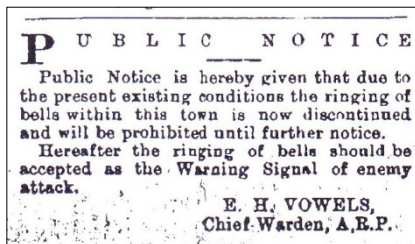
### Evacuation to Cooyar and life there, 1942-1944

The Angelus bell stopped ringing!

For many years the beautiful bell<sup>1</sup>, enscribed and embossed with images of the Sacred Heart and the crest of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, had rung out the Angelus at 6.00am, at noon and at 6.00pm giving a regular rhythm to the lives of the Sisters and the children at the Orphanage and to neighbours within hearing. The day-pupils would have been very accustomed to the midday ringing of the bell.



But the tranquility of the Island was threatened with a message filled with foreboding in the *Torres Strait Pilot* of December 19<sup>th</sup> 1941, where there was a tiny mention of an order by the Chief Warden to cease ringing bells on the Island other than as a signal of enemy attack.



The “War in the Pacific” was nearing Thursday Island. Certainly the Sisters would have explained to the children why the Angelus bell was no longer being rung. The reality of war was sinking in.

Beginning in 1939 an airstrip had been constructed on Horn Island. That would have been the talk of T.I. for some time, and the sight of planes approaching to land at Horn Island would have been an interesting novelty; soon, sadly, to be a signal of the War coming to the Torres Strait.

Then there came the order for the civilians of Thursday Island to evacuate. In *The Timeless Isle*<sup>2</sup> it is told like this:

“On 27<sup>th</sup> January a tiny notice in the “Daily Pilot” changed the life of every civilian on T.I. with dramatic suddenness. Fortress Commander R. J. R.Hurst ordered complete and immediate evacuation. Residents were given until 6.00pm the following day to prepare for their departure. Taking only what they could carry, they embarked on the liners Zealandia and Ormiston for destinations in southern centres as far as Brisbane.”



Maggie McNulty<sup>3</sup> also recalls: “Oh, the war! I shall never forget the evacuation ... twenty-four hours notice ... two suitcases each ... and our ship, the Ormiston, ran into a cyclone – it was a nightmare.”

Thanks to Elizabeth Osborne we have a facsimile of this life-changing proclamation:

#### TO THURSDAY ISLAND PUBLIC

Decision has been given that the women and children of Thursday Island be compulsorily evacuated. All women and children, white and coloured, will therefore be prepared to leave Thursday Island by ship at 6 p.m. on 28<sup>th</sup> January. Suit cases and personal effects only may be taken. Further notice will be given if additional belongings are later allowed. Port of disembarkation will be notified later. T.J.R. Hurst Lt.-Col. Staff corps, Fortress Commander, Thursday Island.

<sup>1</sup> The photo is of the bell after restoration in 1984 before being replaced in a newly built bell tower. It was cast in France in 1892. This information is taken from p.70 125<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, the on-going story of the Sacred Heart Mission, Thursday island, 1884-2009.

<sup>2</sup> p.66.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Rees, p.78.



And to give a feel for the anxiety and rush of the days following, the recollections of one white woman are provided here<sup>4</sup>:

*"They came around in the morning and told us to be ready by 10 o'clock. We had no idea of what was going to happen. There was washing on the line, meals being cooked, clothes being boiled on the fire in the backyard, there were chickens being hatched. It was a hell of a mess ... we didn't think about being evacuated. We didn't want to leave, we cried."*



One of the nuns remembered<sup>5</sup>:

*"The scene I remember best was the actual departure of the Ormiston from T.I. jetty. Mothers and children on board the Ormiston, the fathers standing on the jetty as we pulled out. All, both men and women, were in tears. They made no effort to hide their tears, they couldn't. These families from both Thursday Island and Hammond Island had never been separated from one another. Some would never meet again."*

to the scene<sup>6</sup>, as one man told Osborne:

*"The guards stand at the end of the jetty with a bayonet, you take your wife that far and the guard let them through the barricade and you stand behind. You cannot go on the boat."*

And interestingly the last night was spent on the convent verandah. For some reason the Ormiston was delayed and *"Meanwhile, twenty-three adults and seventy-one children were fed and accommodated on the convent verandah on Thursday Island waiting for the SS Ormiston to dock."*<sup>7</sup>

(The photos of ships are: that heading to the left, SS Ormiston; that heading to the right: Zealandia. There seems to be most agreement that the evacuation of the women and children was on the Ormiston.)



The reader can locate Cooyar on this 1990s map<sup>8</sup> at the extreme left (West), beside the tiny aeroplane/airstrip symbol, S.South-West of Nanango.

The destination of the Sisters, Father W. H. Flynn (pictured), Brother Carter and the children was a disused hotel, the Royal Mail, owned by a Mrs.



McGinley in Cooyar, near Nanango in Queensland, which was leased by the Federal Government for the duration.

<sup>4</sup> Osborne, p.16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.68

<sup>6</sup> P.67.

<sup>7</sup> P.67

<sup>8</sup> Wadley, D., Ed. Reef, Range and Red Dust, Qld. Dept of Lands, Brisbane, 1993

*"The Royal Mail had served as a boarding house for loggers and travelers from very early in the century. Later it had been converted to a hotel. It fell in to disrepair after some years of no occupancy, but its proposed demolition was deferred when Father Flynn negotiated a lease of it."*<sup>9</sup>



The arrangements were made by the Queensland Department of Native Affairs with the financial assistance of the Commonwealth Government.

It would not have taken the children at the orphanage long to put their meagre clothes and possessions in a bag. But the Sisters may have been in a flurry to decide on what they would need to take both for themselves and the care of the children. Everyone from Hammond Island, also, was part of this evacuation to Cooyar.

Their reception in Cairns is reported in the *Cairns Post* 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1942, p.2. in a snippets column, *By the Way*.

But we might try to imagine the experience of these Islanders thrown into an alien environment; first of all the ship and life on board and then landing in Brisbane and gaining a glimpse of a large city, followed by their first journey by train onward to a disused hotel in a rural area. Surely many strange things to take in.

## EVACUEES ARRIVE.

### FROM NORTHERN ISLANDS.

Two ships arrived at the week-end at an Australian port, one from Thursday Island and the other from Port Moresby. The former brought about 100 mission children from Hammond Island in the charge of Father W. H. Flynn. There were eight Sisters with the children, and 14 girls from the Convent orphanage. Their evacuation was ordered at 48 hours' notice. At the Australian port of arrival the party was given every assistance by members of the Red Cross and V.A.D. persons. They reported that water at present is scarce at Thursday Island, and is being sold at 3d. a bucket. It was also said commodities were short. The ship which arrived from Port Moresby was delayed for many days, as it had to wait for evacuees from various parts of the Mandated Territory. While waiting, the crew feared bombing by the Japanese, but no enemy planes came over. Conditions were quiet in the Port Moresby area, but compulsory evacuation had been ordered.

One of the Sisters recalled the excitement of the children on their first train ride<sup>10</sup>:

*"[They] had never seen a train before and in their excitement lost all sense of fear. We spent our time up and down the carriages endeavouring to save heads and limbs. They couldn't see the danger of leaning out of the carriages – not just arms but the whole body from the waist up was extended as far as possible."*

Elizabeth Osborne was told a story<sup>11</sup> about the evacuees' first night in Cooyar and the special supper that the well-meaning local community had prepared. Trying to be as welcoming as possible, but knowing little of Islander people and their being different from mainland Aboriginal people, one of the welcoming group apologised for not being able to offer them snake! *"We couldn't get any snake,"* they said.

But the local people, both Catholic and non-Catholic were very welcoming and provided the re-

## By the Way

Girls of the Legion of Mary enjoyed their job of playing nursemaids to the many little "piccaninnies" who were evacuated from the mission at Hammond Island. The girls escorted the children to and from their meals and looked after them generally. The women and girls from the mission were housed in St. Monica's school and the Central State schools, where they seemed to be quite happy. Lines and lines of clothes testified that any day is washing day when there are children about.

Overheard.—A woman, who had no wish to go now, said: "I'm not going to be evaporated until I have to."

--- Jeanette.



<sup>9</sup> Pp. 69-70.

<sup>10</sup> P.70

<sup>11</sup> P.70



located “Mission” with fruit and vegetables and firewood. Dan Kruger remembers his family giving potatoes and pumpkins.<sup>12</sup>

Terry Cuskelly was a lad of 14 at the time of the evacuees’ arrival and recalls<sup>13</sup> how he was bringing cream in a spring cart to the Cooyar railhead the day one trainload arrived. He was asked if he could help with conveying people and goods to the hotel. This delayed him for some hours leaving his parents wondering what had kept him from what usually was a short, straightforward trip. The children seem to have lost any shyness or inhibitions by this time as Terry recalls he was pestered with requests to “Give us a ride, Mister!”



Father Flynn was the chief organiser, though Mother Rosario would have been the energetic supervisor of the women organising their chores around the now life-filled hotel and in arranging and teaching lessons for the children. Sister Bernadette was in charge of the kitchen and young Mary Bin-Juda was appointed as her assistant. From Sr. Bernadette Mary learned how to make cakes etc. Her method of making butter, she remembers, involved a lot of hard physical shaking. She described Sr. Bernadette

as, “like a mother to me.” “I used to joke around with her,” she recalled<sup>14</sup>. Mary remembers her own mother fishing in the creek and catching eels ... which only some people were willing to eat.



This press report from the *Cairns Post*<sup>15</sup> is inaccurate. It says there were *eight* Sisters accompanying the adults and children. The archivist at Kensington<sup>16</sup> gives the names of the Sisters as Mother Rosario Desmond (Superior), Emmanuel Chapman, Cyril Fitzpatrick and Bernadette Clark. As time goes by and we get to 1944, it is just Father Docherty who is with the folk at Cooyar and Sister Rosario and Sister Emanuel -- just two Sisters -- and Brother Carter.

(The accompanying photos are of Sister Cyril and Sister Bernadette (with glasses). The photo of Brother Carter was taken approx. 20 years after his Cooyar days. The photo of the Sister below is Sister Emmanuel.)

Ted Cherry remembers (2011)<sup>17</sup> that Brother Carter, “lived across the street from the Royal Mail Hotel; he was a carpenter and did odd building jobs.”

As time went by and Father Flynn found some of the older boys “a bit of a problem”<sup>18</sup>, he wrote to his superiors asking if he could be joined by Brother



(Photo taken from the back of the hotel.)

George Carter who had been such a help on Hammond Island with his skills in carpentry and other practical matters some years previously. This was agreed to and Brother Carter joined the group and soon had a flourishing garden planted, eventually producing enough for the Mission with surplus available to selling to the local troops.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Phone conversation with the author, May, 2011

<sup>13</sup> Phone conversation with the author, May, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> *Cairns Post*, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Krijnen in conversation with archivist, Sr. Mona, in August, 2011

<sup>17</sup> As told to Jean Petersen in her Memoir of 2011.

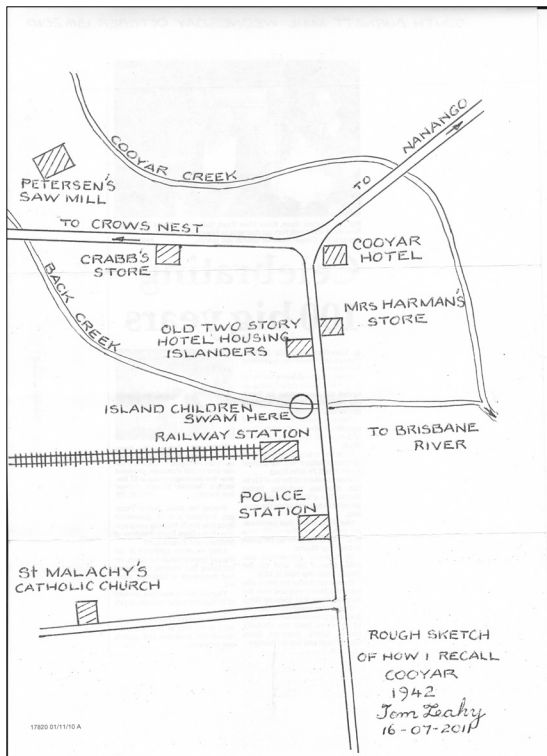
<sup>18</sup> Osborne, p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Vincent Durante, a child at Cooyar at the time, in conversation with Brother Barry in September, 2011.

Vincent Dorante recalls that the vegetable garden was so large “you couldn’t see from one end to the other.” All manner of vegetable were grown, spinach, carrots, shallots, beetroot, cabbage, water melon and much more.

Terry Cuskelly remembers the Sisters as Sister Mary Rosario, Sister Margaret Mary and Sister Mary Emanuelle. He remembers Father Flynn used to say Mass in the hotel and on one occasion he appealed to the locals for wood as the cold weather approached. Joe Schick responded and prepared a load, but when he was to deliver it there was a very heavy downpour of rain and against advice he set out. His load overturned and got washed away.

Leo recalls his father also assisting with loads of wood and mentions the generosity of the Garske family.



There would be numerous stories like these of kindnesses of the local people, but with the passing of the years details of such generosity have not been kept. Seventy years later Mary Bin-Juda recalled<sup>20</sup> how the locals brought food for the folk from T.I. and Hammond, “and were very friendly, too.”

Another act of generosity recently (2011) discovered is contained in a memoir of Jean Petersen<sup>21</sup>. She writes: “Bob Barron owned some land along Back Creek which he gave to the Thursday Islanders to grow their vegetables.”

About a year after the original evacuation, the men who had been forced to stay on T.I. as part of the defence arrangements, were allowed to join their families in Cooyar.

Francis Dorante arrived in 1943 to assist his wife, Mary, in caring for their many children. He gained employment slaughtering cattle for the local butcher. Many of the others picked up work in and around Cooyar and Kingaroy on the various farms and were permitted to take their older sons with them to



help. In this way Vincent Dorante remembers accompanying his father and his cousins to help pick peanuts on the Bjelke-Petersen property at Kingaroy, not knowing that later, Johannes, “Joh”, Bjelke-Petersen would become Premier of Queensland and stamp his particular style of politics on the State for many years. And years later, still, would visit Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School to open the new school buildings in 1973, thirty years on.

Dan Kruger remembers some names. He mentioned particularly Jim, James and George Wallace who worked for Jack Staines, remarking that they were very good workers. “Bob was a very conscientious young fellow,” he said.

William Anderson remembers gaining some work on a dairy farm owned by Jacky Trapp.

Some women and girls gained employment in domestic duties on local farms and elsewhere.

<sup>20</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Memoir written for Br. Barry, December, 2011.





The younger boys, when not doing schoolwork, were occupied in the vegetable garden and fetching water from the creek till Br. Carter arranged for a pump to do the job; but that involved taking it in turns to man the pump. There were also four cows and a poultry yard.<sup>22</sup>

(Photos show Father Joseph Docherty with a group of children; group photo shows left to right, Francis Sabatino, Francis Dorante, (child at back – Daniel Sabasio-Wallis), Mary Dubbins, Mary Walton, Mary Darroth (almost entirely obscured); Mother holding baby: Mary Domate holding Bertrum.)

Now imagine this interesting scene<sup>23</sup>:

*“By the end of the first year [1942], the young women were confident enough about their new surroundings to stage a financially successful dance in the town. Father Flynn was impressed when 50 pounds was cleared for the night. In the past, it seemed, Catholic dances in Cooyar had not been so well supported. The tradespeople, Catholic and non-Catholic, proved to be generous. They made*

*donations of food and fuel, even though their generosity was exercised at some cost to themselves because, as an old Cooyar man remarked, ‘nobody had much money then’.*”



But all was not just schoolwork and gardening for the children. The creek provided a wonderful place to swim, slide down the bank and fish.

As early as May, 1942, one family had left the mission, and a little while later, another.<sup>24</sup> The opportunity of work for fathers of families and the cramped conditions at the hotel convinced some to build their lives elsewhere.

In April, 1943, Father Joseph Docherty replaced Father Flynn as the priest-in-charge. He immediately introduced some beneficial changes: upgrading the chapel, a new bathroom, a proper clothesline and a regulation urinal. And to his great credit he realised that the Sisters were struggling on with virtually no comforts and he thoughtfully made provisions for better conditions for the Sisters.<sup>25</sup>



The Winters of 1942 and 1943 were particularly cold and for folk who had never experienced cold this was a special trial. They had never seen frost. But they endured. One of the nuns present at the time told Osborne<sup>26</sup>:

*“They had warm clothes and blankets but no heating ... I never heard them complain. They asked for what they needed, then coped with the discomfort.”*

(Photo is of Father Joseph Docherty and children. The girl on the extreme left of the photo is believed to be Calre Constance and the partly concealed face in the very centre of the back row is Bonnie (Veronica)

<sup>22</sup> Osborne, p.79.

<sup>23</sup> Osborne, pp.73-74.

<sup>24</sup> Osborne, p.78.

<sup>25</sup> Osborne, p.79.

<sup>26</sup> p.80.

Sabatino.)

Jean Petersen, in a memoir<sup>27</sup> wrote: *“I can vouch for the cold Winters; the water pipes in the 1950s could be frozen up till 10.00am the next day after a heavy frost.”*

Some of the financial arrangements can be learned from a telegram from the Prime Minister, Mr. Ben Chifley, found in the Queensland State Archives in a folder devoted to the evacuation of the adults and children of Thursday and Hammond Islands to Cooyar and also to Cherbourg. This telegram is addressed to the Queensland Premier:

“WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR GOVERNMENT ARRANGE ON BEHALF OF THE COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE TO WHITE EVACUEES FROM THESE PLACES ON THE SAME STANDARD SCALE AS HAS BEEN FIXED IN THE CASE OF PERSONS EVACUATED TO AUSTRALIA FROM THE FAR EAST (stop) SUSTENANCE COLOURED PERSONS ONE POUND PER WEEK ADULT PERSONS PLUS FIVE SHILLINGS EACH (Stop) WHERE MORE THAN ONE COLOURED FAMILY RESIDING ONE HOUSEHOLD MAXIMUM PAYMENT EACH HOUSEHOLD FIVE POUNDS PER WEEK (Stop) SUSTENANCE PAYMENTS FOR MAN OR MAN AND FAMILY TO BE LIMITED TO ONE MONTH AND FOR A WOMAN AND CHILDREN TO THREE MONTHS (stop) ...”

By gaining work in the local community friendships were made between the local residents and the Islander evacuees. An interesting case in point is reflected in the accompanying photos of “Scotty” (John or Kenny) Sebasio) and Clive Huskins. One taken in Cooyar days (1942-4) and getting together again later (appears to be the 1970s).



In time for Christmas, 1943, George Asange who had stayed on Thursday Island when the others were evacuated, placed a “cheerio” message in the *Courier Mail*<sup>28</sup> addressed to the evacuees. It is reproduced here:

**T**o all the old friends of Thursday Island who were evacuated, and wherever you may be. I extend to you best wishes, and hope that 1944 will bring about a speedy victory over the enemy to enable you all to return home. George Asange, Thursday Island.

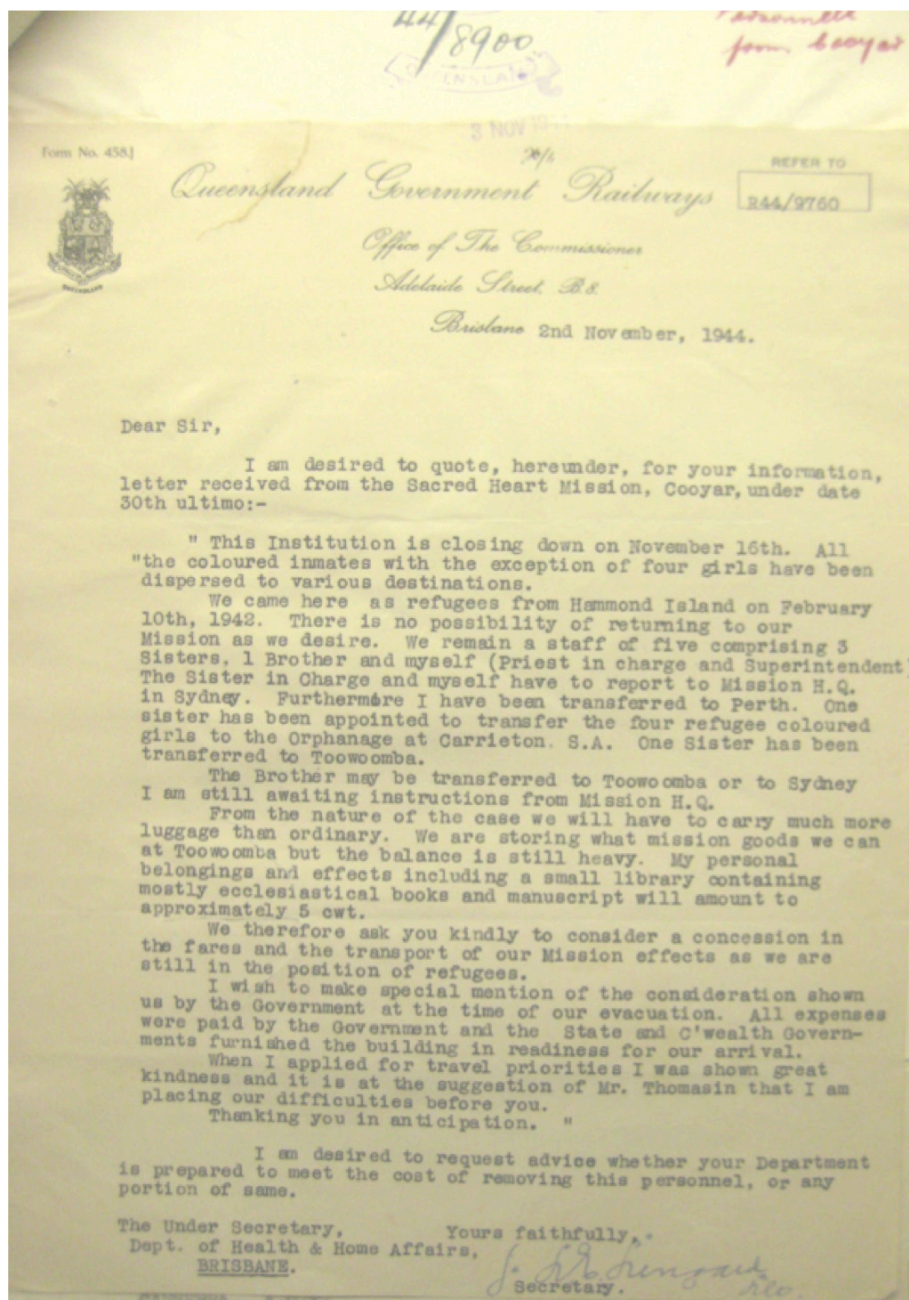
As 1944 progressed there were fewer families remaining at the mission. The decision was made to close down the arrangement and provision was made for the few remaining children to be accommodated elsewhere.

The letter explaining the ending of the adventure of the Thursday Island and Hammond Island people in Cooyar is contained in a letter that the reader may enjoy reading in facsimile:

<sup>27</sup> Memoir sent to Br. Barry in December, 2011.

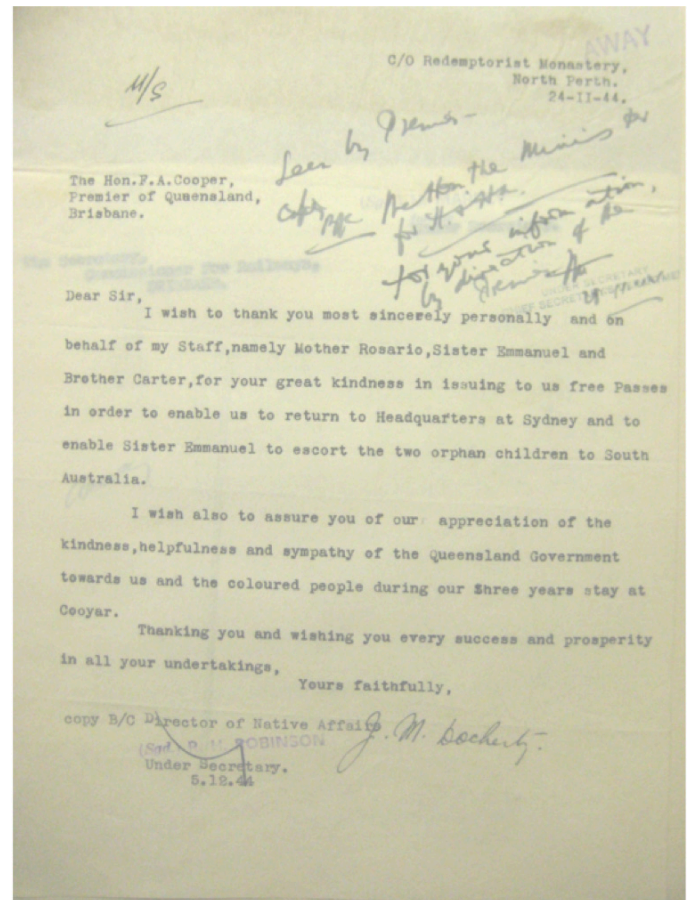
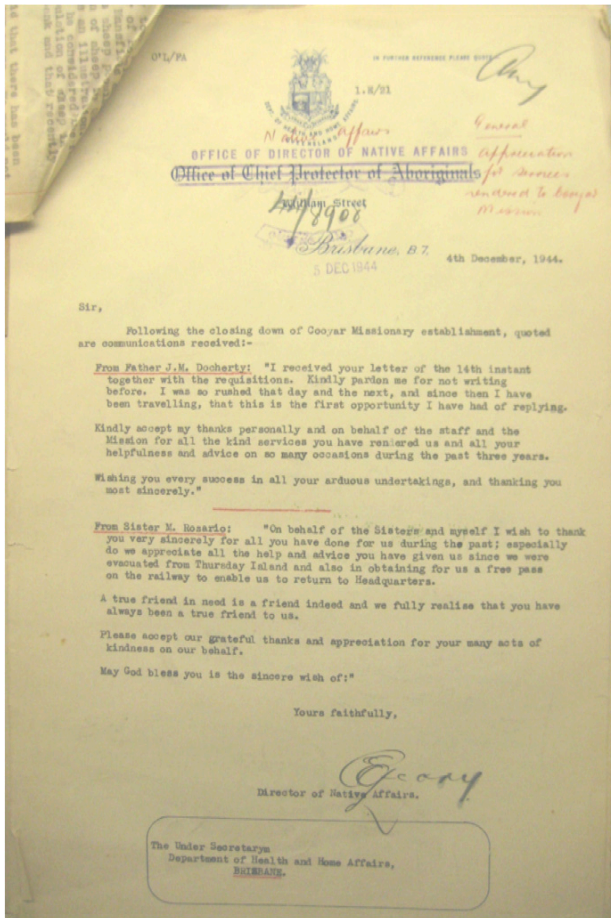
<sup>28</sup> Courier Mail, 24<sup>th</sup> December





Note in this letter it is stated that "*All the coloured inmates with the exception of four girls have been dispersed to various destinations.*" And so the sojourn in Cooyar came to an end.

Two letters tell of the gratitude of the staff to the officers of the Department of Native Affairs and the Premier. They are reproduced here, bringing to an end this very different episode in the history of some of the students and families of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island.



A curiosity, but a sign of change, is the letterhead of the first letter. The letterhead was originally headed "Office of Chief Protector of Aborigines", but has been boldly crossed out and a rubber stamp printed above it: **"OFFICE OF DIRECTOR OF NATIVE AFFAIRS"**. While saving money by not discarding obsolete letterhead, the page tells a story of changes taking place in the Australian Government's (and the general Australian public's) perception of Indigenous people.

### Where did they go?

Where did all these children and their parents go after 1944? Some insight, based on extensive research of a general nature (not specifically to the people evacuated to Cooyar), can be found in Elizabeth Osborne's analysis of Torres Strait Women and the Pacific War. She writes:

*"Initially, the evacuee women were apprehensive about the mainland. Racist attitudes very soon became apparent. Nonetheless, it seems that, whether young or old, the women adapted in their own way to the mainland. For the majority of the Hammond Island women, the ultimate demonstration of this was their willingness to remain on the mainland when the opportunity finally arrived to return home."*





## CHAPTER 17

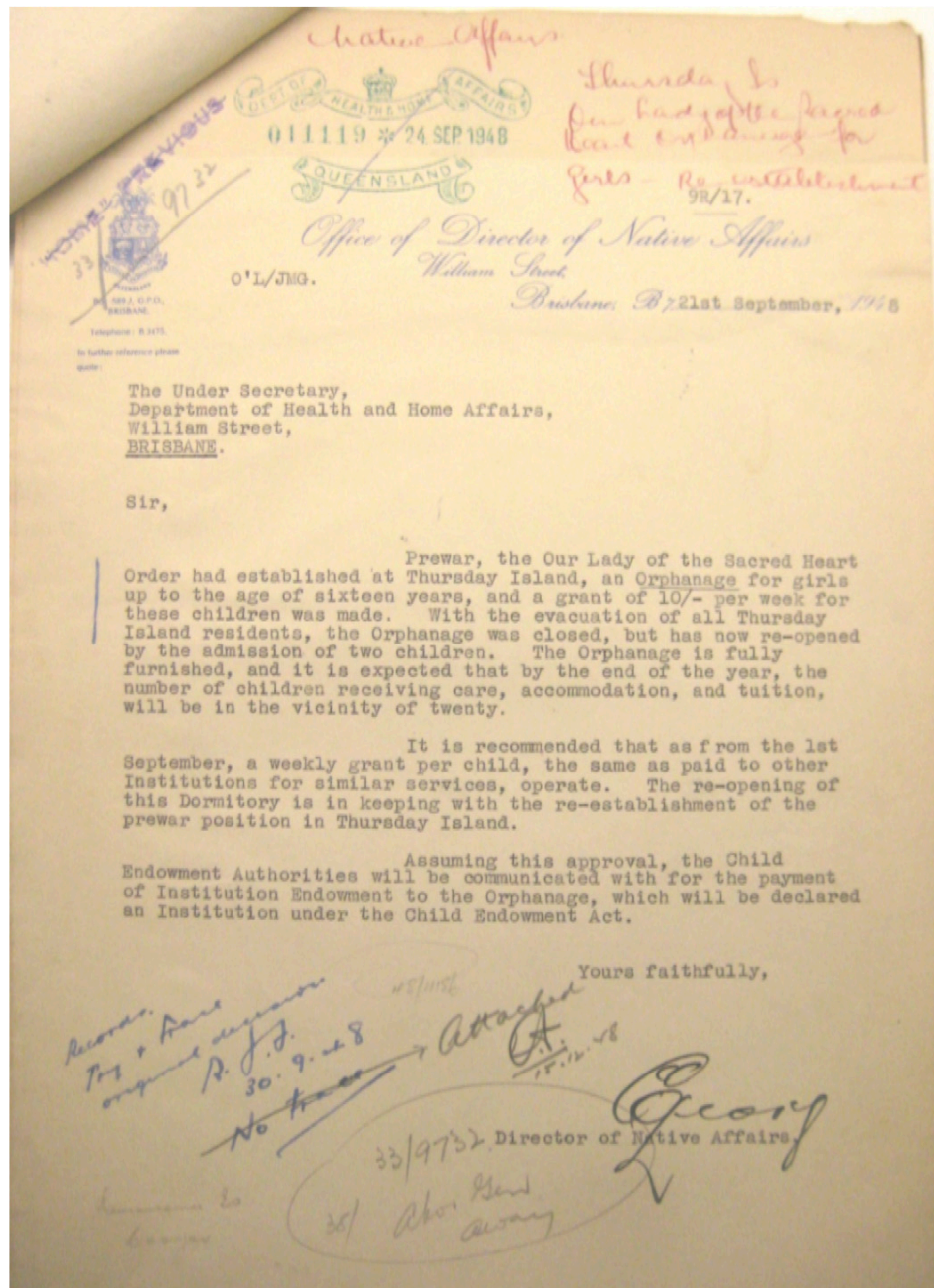
### Disappearance of the school, 1944-1947

Was there any activity at the Convent and School between October, 1944, and 1947?

In the letter to Premier Johannes Bjekle-Petersen of 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1973<sup>1</sup>, the Premier is informed that, “*after the war the building [the old orphanage] remained empty and then renovations began in 1961.*”

But this is somewhat contradicted by a statement in the Centenary History of the Sacred Heart Mission<sup>2</sup> where we read:

*“The Orphanage was in constant use until evacuation during World War II in 1942. It was re-opened in 1948 for only a short time. Amongst other factors, child endowment gave parents the much needed assistance to care for their families and the need vanished.”*



<sup>1</sup> The letter was to brief him on the history of the school prior to his coming to open a school building.

<sup>2</sup> *Our First Hundred Years*, un-numbered pages.



Letters from the Office of Director of Native Affairs held in the Queensland State Archives asking for consideration for payment for two girls, dated 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1948, confirm that the Orphanage which was closed, “*has now reopened by the admission of two children.*” The letter goes on to predict, falsely as it turns out, that, “*It is expected that at the end of the year, the number of children receiving care, accommodation and tuition, will be in the vicinity of twenty.*”

No more is heard of children being admitted to the Orphanage after this reference in 1948.<sup>3</sup>

### **Child Endowment and effect on the Orphanage**

Mention has been made of the *Child Endowment* being a factor in the cessation of the orphanage. This refers to The Child Endowment Act of 1941. An explanation of the provisions of the Act is given on the net by the Australian Government Parliamentary Library site in 2011:

#### **1941 Child Endowment Act 1941 (No. 8 of 1941)**

From July [1941] Child Endowment (CE) was paid direct to the mother, at a flat rate of five shillings per week for each child after the first under the age of 16 years. Children living in Commonwealth or State government institutions were excluded from endowment. It was not subject to any means test, nor was it taxable. A child for endowment purposes had to be under 16 years of age. Both the claimant and child had to have been born in Australia or resident in Australia for twelve months immediately prior to the claim. Children of alien fathers were excluded from eligibility unless they were born in Australia or the mother was a British subject.

It may be wise to repeat an explanation given earlier, while now drawing a line under the history of the “Orphanage”, that it was really a “Boarding School.” While there may have occasionally been children who had no parents to go to, it was mainly an opportunity for the children of families of outer islands to be able to gain and education. They were not “orphans”.

Former students seem to remember school resuming in 1948. However the correct date is 1947, as we shall see in the chapter on the resumption of school after the war.

So from the dispersal of the children from Cooyar at the end of 1944 till some time in 1947 there was no Sacred Heart School operating. Exactly when the Sisters returned to the convent is unknown. There are statements that the Sisters returned to Hammond Island in 1950; but whether the Sisters returned to the T.I. convent before 1947 has not yet (2011) been discovered.

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<sup>3</sup> Because of various circumstances and a request from a family living on Hammond Island there were three children “boarding” during part of the 1950s. Cecilia Sabatino was one of these. These children earned their keep by doing various chores. (Conversation with Brother Barry, October, 2011.)

## CHAPTER 18

### Thursday Island after the War

Rather sad and depressing it is to have to relate that our troops during the War treated very ill the houses that the civilian population had been forced to hurriedly abandon at the time of the forced evacuation in 1942 that is mentioned in an earlier chapter.

#### Physical damage

So extensive was the damage that the government set up a “War Damages Commission” to investigate.

If we begin with a remark by A.M.Campbell, “I was the R.S.M”, telling of February, 1942 (Qld State Library: VF 940.53/Cam/C1) : *“Lucky for us, unlucky for the residents who had been evacuated, we took over their homes. The sergeant and myself took over the State School as our billet.”*

Let us now fast forward to 1946 when the island was returned to civilian rule. People started to return to find their places overgrown and furniture missing. Long-time resident and later editor and producer of the *Torres News*, Mrs Gwen Moloney, told Sister Rovenia Duffy<sup>1</sup> that all her furniture had been taken and the only thing remaining was a religious picture of the Sacred Heart on one wall. Pat Jones recalls Mrs. Moloney telling her with great regret that she found her “prized” piano but that it had been ruined with liquids having been poured over it.<sup>2</sup>



National Library of Australia



The same A.M. Campbell quoted earlier mentions on p.11 of his memoir, *“I went ashore on T.I. from the navy Corvette HMAS “Fremantle” on 23/4/45 and was saddened to see what had happened to a once well remembered island.”*

<sup>1</sup> As reported to Br. Barry in August, 2011; and as reported, also, by Mrs. Pat Jones in May, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Written notes by Pat Jones, June, 2011.



("Thursday Is. Homes Looted" is from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1946, p.5; and "Thursday Island Affairs" is from the *Cairns Post* of 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1946, p.1.)

The following facsimile provides very depressing reading with its description of T.I. in 1950.<sup>3</sup>

## THURSDAY ISLAND REVISITED—TEN YEARS LATER

# 'Like meeting a friend —gone to the pack'

**M**Y return to this once - charming coconut - fringed pearling base was like meeting an old friend who has gone to the pack.

Thursday Island has been sent to the pack by:—

- A war.
- A disinterested government and a decline in local civic pride.

You reach Thursday Island by A N A. plane to Horn Island, bump your way four miles in an ancient truck to a disintegrating jetty, then huddle in the fumes of a snub-nosed barge for two miles across the strait to the place itself.

★  
**F**ROM the Thursday Island wharf your view is a three-mile expanse of waterfront debris—old barges, pontoons, rusting buoys, angle iron, pipes, wheels, chains, water tanks, and sheet iron. Everywhere there is the rusty 44-gallon oil drum.

Rising in the background, the island's old beauty is still there. The hills are now green with trees and grass. The coconut palms on the strand and through the streets are as noble as ever.

But then you walk past the swimming pool alongside the "en-

gineers' wharf. It is of stone, generously built, and littered with rusting junk, its bottom is grey mud, disgusting to see and smell.

The Japs did not bomb Thursday Island. The Australian Army did a fine demolition job when it scavenged the town for material. In the main street — Douglas Street — shops alternate with

● On Thursday Island they tell visitors, "Eat a wongai nut, and some day you will return!" *Courier-Mail* staff reporter **ALAN UNDERWOOD** visited "T.I." in 1940 and ate a wongai nut. Last week he returned — just 10 years later. But this time he left wongai nuts right alone. He has no wish to go back there.



**WONGAI NUT—**  
one taste enough.

vacant blocks where other shops once stood. The rubble remains, untidy, half-covered with rank, tropical weeds.

One corner of the town's main intersection is the foundation ruins of the burnt-out Metropole Hotel. The cellar is still there, brimful of slime-covered water. The mosquitoes are bad on Thursday Island.

There is only one tarred road—Victoria Parade, which skirts the waterfront. The others are rock and blue metal, with water filled potholes. You walk on the roads; the footpaths—except right in town—cannot be found.

Thursday Island has 12 cars, and seven of these are taxis. Best car is Major John Dunwoodie's black Humber Snipe. Most people walk. The taxis get 95 per cent. of their income from native pas-

sengers. The taxis get 95 per cent. of their income from native passengers. Petrol is 4 10 a gallon.

Not one of Thursday Island's four hotels is sewer. Within 15 yards of one hotel dining room is a sawn-off tank filled with garbage.

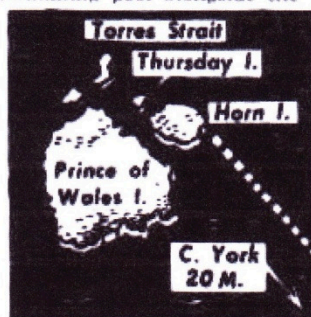
For food, they cater reasonably well. The island's best hotel is for sale for £10,000. Two others are to let.

★  
**T**HE housing problem there is worse than Brisbane's.

A post office clerk told me he and his wife had been forced to live in a hotel for six months. Private citizens find it almost impossible to build. Federal and State Government servants are having houses and barracks built, but the jobs drag slowly.

The people are incensed at their treatment by the War Damages Commission. When they evacuated and the army took over in 1942, the residents left everything behind. The army scrambled everything and householders have lost a great deal of their furniture for good.

Said one angry housewife: "My chairs are down at the hospital. My refrigerator is in the home of a government employee. For my loss of furnishings worth £1200, the government gave me a cheque for £150."



gineers' wharf. It is of stone, generously built, and littered with

<sup>3</sup> The *Courier Mail*, 24 January, 1950, p.2.



Housewives—there are less than 100 adult white women—have a torrid time on Thursday Island. Eggs cost 5/6 a dozen, tiny, cold-store oranges 6/6 a dozen, apples 5/8. A 4lb. loaf of bread 1/9. Beef, mutton, and pork are available only for a fortnight after the freighter, *Elaanna*, makes her monthly trip from Brisbane. All milk comes from tins. It is no place for growing children.

Medicine is free! It comes from the island hospital. One white woman recently received her Government cough mixture in a beer bottle.

For bachelors, life is no idyll. Full board at a hotel costs nearly £5 a week. Beer is 3/4 a bottle, a gin squash 1/6, a bottle of un-deterproof rum 2/7.

### ★ SOCIETY barely ticks over.

There is a very occasional dance, a little bridge-playing and sometimes a private boat picnic. Mrs. O'Leary, wife of the Queensland Native Affairs Director, is a charming hostess. From her bungalow guests have a fine view of neighbouring islands

—spoilt only by two dilapidated sheds a few yards in front. One of them used to be the morgue.

For culture, the council library has 1000 books. The Thursday Island Dramatic Society is working hard to produce "Pygmalion" in April. An adult education movement will be launched by a lecturer who will visit the island from Cairns, in a couple of weeks' time.

I asked Mayor Dunwoodie when would something be done to clean up Thursday Island a little.

He replied: "This is nothing. You should have seen it when we got the island back from the Army!"

Ald. Dunwoodie says the big shortage is manpower.

But the town clerk (Mr. J. G. Duff) says it will cost at least a quarter of a million pounds to make Thursday Island shipshape again. The council, with a puny income, is almost broke. It is fighting for a State loan of £21,000 to tar the streets. It had to borrow £20,000 for extra power plant to eliminate the island's present power restrictions, and £2000 to buy one or two machines for the roads.

★  
**D**ESPITE an alleged manpower shortage, Thursday Island has crowds of coloured people doing nothing. They throng the streets and fish from the wharves and beaches. The billiard saloons of See Kee and Lal Foo are crowded with natives from seven in the morning to eleven at night. They are expert billiards players.

Yet, to employ a native labourer you must pay him the full award rate of £7/15/ a week. A half-trained native carpenter gets the same pay as a skilled white tradesman—£10/0/4. A housegirl—if you can find one—must get 22/6 a week and her keep.

There are one or two "good openings" at Thursday Island. They need a good mixed shop selling Casket tickets, cosmetics, and proprietary medicines. They need a barber. And there is no paper since the hand-set Torres Straits Pilot folded up for the evacuation.

From the many interviews that went to make up her research, Elizabeth Osborne<sup>4</sup> summarises, "*Both the Hammond and Thursday Island women were overwhelmed by the devastation of their islands.*"

Mr. D. B. Farquhar, the honorary secretary-treasurer of the Thursday Island Association, interviewed in Rockhampton for the *Morning Bulletin*<sup>5</sup> in 1946, told of the damage to homes and abandoned pearling luggers. One annoying matter he noted was how the soldiers had left "pin ups" everywhere:

"Pin ups' was another cause of damage. Most walls of the buildings were covered with typical 'pin-up' photos of actresses, he said. One room he had seen was obviously occupied by a 'fan' of one particular actress. Her photos covered the four walls and the occupant had started pasting them to the ceiling."

As late as 1949 an indignant Ivy Guivarra, the Secretary, Coloured Social Club, Cairns, wrote to the *Cairns Post*<sup>6</sup> protesting at a suggestion that some Torres Strait folk living rough in Cairns should be forthwith returned to Thursday Island. Amongst other things she writes:

"Islanders are unable to return to their islands because of the extensive damage done to their homes in the name of 'defence' and until proper accommodation is offered I would suggest that the R.S.S.A.-I.L.A. turn their resolutions to the effort of making housing available before resolving to deport, willy-nilly, coloured Islanders who had no wish to leave their heritage in the first place, but who find that they have now, no heritage to return to."

An observer in 1949 (at least the book was published in 1949)<sup>7</sup> writes in a somewhat light-hearted vein, though it would not have been a laughing matter to those who had to endure it:

"Horne [sic] Island, scarred by Japanese bombs, was completely deserted; but Thursday Island, still licking the wounds of wartime occupation by the army and navy, is regaining strength. During the war civilians were evacuated. When they returned, they discovered a certain amount of confusion had crept in. Mrs. Smith's piano had become located at Mrs. Brown's, whose refrigerator had been transferred to Mrs. Greene's. Mrs. Jones's wireless set was no longer where she had left it, and in some cases even the clothes lines had changed hands. By the time we arrived, most of the sorting out had been attended to, and order established out of chaos. ..."

In the melancholy article in *The Courier Mail*, reproduced in facsimile, Alan Underwood reports what he saw returning to Thursday Island, having previously visited in 1940.

<sup>4</sup> *Torres Strait Women and the Pacific War*, p.251

<sup>5</sup> *Morning Bulletin*, 18<sup>th</sup> February, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1949, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Lock, A.C.C., *Tropics and Topics*, p.281.



The patient reader who perseveres in reading the facsimile reproduced in these pages will be rewarded with a vivid word picture of Thursday Island in 1950. Not a pretty place! Referring to the damage he writes:

*"The people are incensed at their treatment by the War damages Commission. When they evacuated and the army took over in 1942, the residents left everything behind. The army scrambled everything and householders have lost a great deal of their furniture for good. Said one angry housewife: 'My chairs are down at the hospital. My refrigerator is in the house of a government employee. For my loss of furnishings worth 1,200 pounds, the government gave me a cheque for 150 pounds.'"*

The journalist asked the Mayor, Mr. Dunwoodie, "when would something be done to clean up Thursday Island a little?"

*"He replied: 'This is nothing. You should have seen it when we got the island back from the Army!'"*

And I remind the reader that it is already 1950; five years after the end of the War and four years since the Island was returned to the people.

John Singe<sup>8</sup> repeats the mention of destruction:

*"On Thursday Island, as in all towns under army conscription, widespread looting had occurred which discouraged the return of some evacuated civilians."*

In another reference to destruction, Alan Underwood writes: *"The Japs did not bomb Thursday Island. The Australian Army did a fine demolition job when it scavanged the town for materials."*

### Was Thursday Island bombed during the War?

This somewhat throw-away line, *"The Japs did not bomb Thursday Island"* leads in to a bit of a controversy. Several sources say that Thursday Island was not bombed. One reason suggested is that the Japanese believed that a Japanese princess was buried on T.I. Other sources tell of the bombing of Horn Island because of the airport there, but often with the remark that T.I. itself escaped.

In the course of research at the Queensland State Library the author of this history came across several typed pages headed, "THURSDAY ISLAND. FEBRUARY 1942". The reference was posted on the net, listing the Library's holdings on Thursday Island. The library reference is given above.

Readers familiar with Thursday Island will know that the Customs House, built in 1939, and alleged in this document to have been destroyed, is still standing [2011] and is a Heritage building. This matter of whether Thursday Island was bombed deserves further investigation. And the present researcher has never heard any reference to two hotels being destroyed, this being the sole mention of such a thing.

John Singe's contribution to this matter of the bombing of T.I. is contained in the following:

*"The first raid on Nurapai was a great shock to those civilians who remained - mainly white men and mixed race. Arthur Filewood, who had worked on the Thursday Island wharves for over twenty years, ran from his modest bungalow in Hargrave Street to shelter under a nearby concrete culvert. Another European resident ran*

THURSDAY ISLAND.

FEBRUARY 1942.

VF  
940.53  
CAM  
C1

Thursday Island was bombed on a Saturday morning about 11.30 A.M., only a few days after Darwin had been devastated on the 19-2-42. Luckily the civilians on Horn Island and T.I. had been evacuated on the 27-1-42 by the "Manunda" and "Zealandia". They just had to walk out of their homes, with only clothing and private belongings. Everything else was left behind, furniture, pianos, pictures, the lot.

Just as well, for the Island was almost flattened. The only people left were a handful of C.M.F. in Links Camp, the Militia H.Q., and the men at Naval H.Q.. A couple of Govt. employees, the Post-Master, Mr. Reg Hocking from Wanetta Slips, some staff at the hospital, and a small group of male citizens who refused to leave their businesses.

From the photostat pictures, the following buildings etc. were destroyed:-

- Naval H.Q. & Custom House
- National Bank
- Swimming Pool
- Post Office
- Memorial Hall
- Shopping Centre (only 1 Chinese shop left standing)
- 2 Hotels
- Many private homes

<sup>8</sup> Find page

*from his shop in Douglas Street to a slit trench dug in his back yard to find it already occupied by an Aborigine. The fellow had streaked across from where he was working two hundred metres away, in less time than it had taken the European to move twenty metres. The Nancy, a small Island cargo vessel, was moored at the Engineer's Jetty on Thursday Island. The raid caught its four Island crewmen near the Federal Hotel and they found shelter in a drain. However no bombs fell on Thursday Island in these or any other raids."*

### Demand for equal treatment, 1943

A very dramatic development in the self-assertion of the Islanders happened in December, 1943, when The Torres Strait Force virtually "mutinied"! The background of this extraordinary action is explained by Anthony Hall<sup>9</sup>:

*Aborigines and Islanders serving in the units of the Torres Strait Force received about one third the pay of white Australian soldiers. This discriminatory pay scale had no legal basis. Pay scales for the Army were set out in War Financial (Military Forces) Regulations and Military Financial Regulations, neither of which authorised special rates for Torres Strait Islanders or Aborigines. The aim of this underpayment was twofold: it was hoped to preserve the Islanders as a pool of cheap labour for the post-war pearling.*

*In addition to the discriminatory pay scales, Islander soldiers held other grievances against the Army: Islander NCOs had no authority over white private soldiers; Islander soldiers were not permitted to drink or gamble as white soldiers were; some soldiers had waited up to eighteen months for leave to their home islands and local island politics had been disrupted.*

*These problems caused great dissatisfaction among the soldiers and on 30 and 31 December 1943 they mutinied, two companies of men refusing to go to their appointed duties. The soldiers resumed work on 1 January 1944 but the short-lived mutiny had stung the Army into reconsidering their pay. In February 1944 an inter-departmental conference met in Melbourne to examine the question. Representatives from a number of Federal government departments and from the Queensland government attended.*

It was decided to raise their pay to two-thirds of that of other soldiers. And while this is not parity, it is an illustration of what is to come: the inevitable progress to equality.

After the war, as we shall see, everything changed.

### Reconstruction

*"At the end of the Second World War, relations between Island communities and the Department of Native Affairs were good. Returning ex-servicemen found that their families had been well cared for. The Department's control of their trochus-shell earnings had allowed the Badu store and its branches to continue providing Island families with their household requirements throughout the war period.*

*"Plans for rehabilitation were drawn up at a conference of Island Councillors and the Department, held at Thursday Island in 1947. Included in the plans was a housing programme, begun with the purchase of war-surplus buildings and materials using Island Trust Funds, their transportation to the Islands and erection by the people, with government assistance."*<sup>10</sup>

These planned programs came to fruition in the following years.<sup>11</sup>

John Singe<sup>12</sup> tells of the development of Tamwoy suburb:

*"A kilometre north of Douglas Street, on the other side of the island, was Tamwoy suburb. When Islander ex-servicemen settled on TI after the war they were directed to the flats adjoining the old Quarantine Station. Here they built little fibro cottages and planted bananas, sugar cane, sweet potatoes and cassava as they had done at home on the Outer Islands. Some went back on the fishing*

<sup>9</sup> Hall, Robert A., *Fighters from the Fringe, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders recall the Second World War*, Aboriginal Studies Press.

<sup>10</sup> Finch, Pp. 52-3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., P. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Singe, John, *My Island Home*, University of Queensland Press, 2003, p.10.



*boats, but many found cash employment on the boat ships and wharfs, in stores or building houses for more immigrants moving in from the Outer Islands."*

## Social and political changes as a result of the War

The nature of Thursday Island society was changed dramatically and forever because of the War. Singe put it this way:

*"Others [than those who returned to T.I. after the War] had made a new life in the south. Many had married. Few of the Malays or Japanese returned. Before the war no Islanders had been permitted to reside there but afterwards, perhaps in recognition of their contribution to the war effort, the Department of Native Affairs built a 'model' settlement at Tamwoy for Islanders, beginning the exodus from the Outer Islands and ultimately changing the destiny of a race. Thursday Island became the gateway to the south and by 1975 half of all Torres Strait Islanders would be living in the south.*

*"The Torres Strait was never the same after World War II. An Islander serving in the TSLI was quoted as saying: 'The Army has been good for us coloured boys. In the Army we meet good white men. They talk with us. We are friends. Some white men are good. The Education Officer on TI helped us coloured boys a lot. We get any book we want in the Army. We treated like white men in the Army.'*

In another place Singe<sup>13</sup> writes: *"Although many of the old barriers were being broken down, one did not have to look far to see that things had not really changed much at all."* He goes on to itemise the considerable gaps between his salary as a "white" teacher and that of an Islander teacher.

## Change of white/coloured composition of T.I.s population

One of the most dramatic and important changes that came to T.I. after the Second World War was that the population quickly became predominately Islander and coloured and the white population quickly slipped into the minority. To refer to the populations of the Convent School and the State (previously predominately "white") School as probably indicative of the wider population, the figures provided by Mr. Murphy in his "Report on Education and School Buildings on Thursday Island" dated 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1949 are presented. First, under the heading, "State school":

*"Before the war the school population was predominately white with a small sprinkling of Chinese and Japanese children. Since the war the white children have been in a minority in this school. ... Cross-breeds together with Chinese and Japanese outnumber the whites by approximately two to one."*

And under the heading "Convent School":

*"Children of all races – whites, cross-breeds and islanders – attend this school. The proportion of coloured children to white children is 4 to 1."*

Grand [European] matriarch of T.I., Maggie McNulty, is quoted by Father Frank Flynn<sup>14</sup> comparing T.I. before and after the war:

*"She remembers T.I. before World War Two as a lively, prosperous place with many European residents .... But, unlike Darwin, the Japanese surrender did not bring all the old residents flooding back. Only half a dozen of the pre-war European families returned to T.I. and this seemed to take the heart out of the place."*

The Centre for the Government of Queensland posted the following on the internet (2011):

*"The war time internment of Japanese and the emigration of Malays because of the cessation of pearling was more than counterbalanced by the influx of islanders: Thursday Island's population grew from 944 to 2062 during 1947-54."*

## Further movement for equality of treatment

This statement -- *"We treated like white men in the Army"* – and the feelings of equality that it implies, is to be the beginning of the end of discrimination against or separate arrangements for non-whites on Thursday Island. Ironically the War, with its unbelievable death and suffering, becomes the catalyst for beneficial social change in Torres Strait society.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>14</sup> Northern Frontiers, date uncertain, p.181.

Other observers and commentators note the same seismic shift in attitudes. Finch, writing in 1977<sup>15</sup>, notes:

*“As a result of the Islanders’ close contacts with other Australians during the Second World War, it was obvious that the government’s prewar policy of protective separation required some changes. From 1947, the energies of the Department of Native Affairs (now the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement) were devoted towards a goal of ultimate assimilation of all Island (and Aboriginal) people into the Australian community.”*

Finch explains this change of attitude well in these words:<sup>16</sup>

*“Although there had been a long history of contact with missionaries, pearlers, government officials and others, the period of army service was the first time that Island men in such large numbers had lived, worked and occupied their leisure-time side by side with other Australians, whose equal they undoubtedly showed themselves to be. The experiences they gained and the many friendships they made were to have a lasting effect. At Thursday Island, the men were able to hear about and observe the many advantages and facilities available in other Australian communities outside their islands. When they returned home, they determined to work towards changes that would bring increased benefits to the Islands and improvements to the standard of living of their families.*

*“They also became aware of the political advantages the ‘Diggers’ enjoyed because of their possession of Australian citizenship rights.”*

The “colour bar” was breaking down also. In his autobiography Thomas Lowath<sup>17</sup> recalls that prior to the war there was strict segregation in the open-air theatre on T.I. with the whites only allowed to the seats upstairs with the rest confined to the benches downstairs:

*“A move was made by some of the whites and the blacks not to attend the shows unless all should be accepted as the same. After a time the manager of the theatre noticed there were hardly a soul attending, so in quick time the rules were altered. He had no choice but to accept the changes.*

Osborn<sup>18</sup> corroborates this with a quotation and then an interesting summary of the outcome:

*“A member of one of the first families to return told her story:*

*“We just lived on bully beef and fish and after all those things we had in the city, and we came back and they formed the tennis club and no coloureds allowed ... the theatre started and then it was that coloured business again, coloureds not allowed upstairs.*

*“But the ‘coloured’ people were no longer willing to acquiesce in the rule that only whites sat in the upstairs seats. They picketed the theatre and refused to patronise it. Management had to change the rules, but, as one recalcitrant recalled, ‘we all stayed downstairs’”.*

*They preferred it that way, but they had made their stand, something they would have been hesitant about doing before the war.”*

Gerard Peel was inspired by the injustices he had learned about on Thursday Island to write a book about it! Writing from “*The Communist Party offices where I work*” he wanted to, “... inspire the Queensland Labour Movement to do something about [the injustices].”<sup>19</sup> He suggested a long list of improvements in education:

*“Immediate educational needs would appear to be provision of adequate and properly-equipped schools with separate class-rooms for each class; not less white teachers but more of them; complete over-haul of the present syllabi; preparation of completely new and suitable text books, both in English and in their own languages, for use in both lower and upper classes; translation of foreign books into their two languages; the teaching of their own history giving them a correct perspective of their own past thus helping them to solve their own present and future problems and develop a pride and confidence in their own traditions on which to build; also the teaching of more subjects such as the natural sciences, etc.; provision of high school education and of scholarships to Australian universities, later probably a university of their own which could also cater for students from New Guinea; raising of the standards of native teachers by provision of a proper teachers’ college, and payment to them of salaries equal to those paid in Australian schools.”*<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Give reference p.53

<sup>16</sup> P.52.

<sup>17</sup> P.5

<sup>18</sup> P.55

<sup>19</sup> Peel, Gerald, *Isles of the Torres Strait*, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1947, p.7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 124.



He goes on to add suggestions regarding technical education and quotes earlier such recommendations from 1919 and 1932.<sup>21</sup> He has ideas, too, for agriculture on T.I. and the start of secondary industries.<sup>22</sup> Cultural and entertainment needs are also canvassed.<sup>23</sup>

While these thoughts might be considered to be the socialist aspirations of a fervent left-winger, if not Communist, the reader will realise their foresightfulness in the light of subsequent history.

### Changing role of women

*[After the war] "On Thursday Island young women's employment opportunities took a turn for the better; no more scrubbing floors for whites, they took positions as shop assistants, and clerical workers with higher pay. Higher wages for seamen also raised family expectations. However the trauma of the war did little to rid the island of the 'coloured thing'. But, looking back, almost in disbelief, an old woman expressed what all the evacuee women must have felt in their hearts: their evacuation had been 'a really big experience'."*<sup>24</sup>



And a reference is made to the Convent school teaching commercial skills that enabled "coloured" girls to obtain various forms of employment:

*"The war had positive effects on some aspects of the women's lives. A whole range of jobs became available to young T.I. women, such as in stores and cafes: 'After the war my first job was serving behind the counter and I thought I was made. Here I don't have to scrub, polish silver for white women and, oh, I thought it was wonderful.' The convent school's response to the need for office training set the few island girls whose parents could afford the fees on new employment paths: 'Before we didn't have that education to apply for a job in an office.' A more respectable wage enabled young women to purchase fashionable dresses by catalogue from Brisbane ..."*<sup>25</sup>

(The photo of a typist is taken from the net postings of the State Library of Queensland and while not identifying the typist, the photo is said to be of T.I.)

### Growing wealth and financial independence of Islanders

*"In 1941 the pearling fleets were recalled to Japan. Now [1949] The Torres Strait Islanders have come into their own. By fortuitous circumstances, notably high wages earned by them during, and since, wartime, many have purchased their own luggers and have taken charge of the potential industry."*<sup>26</sup>

Lock goes on to say that with the new-found wealth there are dangers: "Unaccustomed to such wealth, a certain air of truculence among some of the young hot-heads is noticeable."

Finch repeats this observation of changed circumstances in the prosperity of the Islanders.<sup>27</sup> He mentions that ex-service men had accumulated a total of \$360,000 in war savings and that along with loans from the I.I.B., "it was not long before an enlarged fleet of forty vessels was operating again, with improved equipment, machinery and, fortunately, record prices of up to \$1,200 a tonne for mother-of-pearl."

This development of Islanders becoming main players in the pearl shell industry after the war is further explained by the Reeses<sup>28</sup>:

*"... the Torres islanders, ... had begun to acquire and run their own boats. Many of the master-pearler's boats were laid up, while the natives fished calmly, shallowly and happily. ... During the war many islanders were in the Australian Army. Discharged, members of family groups pooled their deferred pay to buy boats through army disposals. Most of these craft had sails only, no engines, and the islanders skin-dived for shell in easy*

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., P. 124.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., P.125.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., P.127.

<sup>24</sup> Osborne, m p. 251

<sup>25</sup> Osborne p.56.

<sup>26</sup> Lock, p. 282.

<sup>27</sup> Finch, p.53.

<sup>28</sup> Rees, p. 63.

waters. Gradually they saved money to buy engines and pumps: some borrowed money for improvements from the Island Industries Board, a semi-governmental body which took on itself the dual jobs of negotiating the sale of the islanders' shell for them and supplying them with the goods of civilised life at reasonable prices."

## Changes in the marine industry

"After the war a certain amount of prosperity returned, at least for a few years, as the marine industries rallied out of their stagnation in response to new demands for shell. Prospects for the future looked bright indeed until, in the early 1950s, the pendulum of fate swung back the other way yet again. Technology had discovered the versatility of plastics and the demand for natural materials contracted savagely. T.I.'s economy slumped to disconcerting levels, with minor fluctuations, it remains the same today." <sup>29</sup>

## Discrimination on drinking

In Rees, p.90 we find this conversation [1950s?] with the proprietress, Maree Townsend, of the Royal Hotel. It tells of the tricky situation where some were and some were not allowed to be served alcoholic drinks.<sup>30</sup>

"How do you recognise the coloured men who are allowed to drink?' I asked

"At first they all looked the same,' Maree said. 'You know, the way they do to a person from south. But I soon got to know a St. Paul boy.'

In his railing against the injustices found on T.I. and other islands of the Torres Straits, in the early 1940s, Gerald Peel has this to say about the question of drink<sup>31</sup>:

"The liquor question is another that comes under this heading of cultural needs, and is a very sore point with the islanders. At present [published 1947], even on visits to Thursday Island, they are barred all legal partaking of what we call 'liquid refreshment'. From every respect this discrimination is unjustifiable [And here he adds a footnote which says: "Especially when it is imposed by the Government of part of a country whose national culture centres as much around the bottle as ours does."], apart from which needless to say it does not work. The people get liquor from Thursday Island but illegally, thus at black-market prices and often of very inferior quality deleterious to health. They also make their home-brew. ... Obviously this discrimination should be done away with, ..."

The amendment of Queensland laws next March to allow any coloured person outside aboriginal missions and settlements on the mainland to obtain alcoholic drinks legally was foreshadowed today by the Minister for Health and Home Affairs, Dr. H. Noble, in Parliament. He said the only coloured person outside missions and aboriginal settlements who had any difficulty in obtaining an alcoholic drink was the full blood. But he obtained it anyway by paying a higher price.

If Peel were able to open the November 8<sup>th</sup> issue of *Torres News* in 1960 he would read:

"The amendment of Queensland laws next March to allow any coloured persons outside aboriginal missions and settlements on the mainland to obtain alcoholic drinks legally was foreshadowed today by the Minister for Health and Home Affairs, Dr. H. Noble, in Parliament."

## Abiding undercurrents of tension

Equality of esteem between the different groups on T.I. was still some way off. John Singe explains<sup>32</sup>:

"Though the community was outwardly friendly, deep undercurrents of resentment were never far below the surface. Until 1945 Torres Strait Islanders had not been permitted to live on Thursday Island. They were 'under the Act', living highly regulated lives on the Outer Islands. When they migrated to TI after the war there was friction with the established Port Kennedy community which consisted of Asian and Pacific Islander families whose ancestors had come to Thursday island to work in the pearling industry. These Asian and Pacific Islanders were not 'under the Act' and they had preferred to distance themselves from Torres Strait Islanders. Over generations the Asian/Pacific Islander community at Port Kennedy had coalesced into a distinctly separate community. Torres Strait Islanders referred to them as 'TI half-casts', though many in the Port Kennedy community disliked the term."

There was resentment, too, of the European elite.<sup>33</sup> It was clear that they had the best of everything, and there was not equality of pay scales.

<sup>29</sup> *Timeless Isle* p.67.

<sup>30</sup> Rees, p.90.

<sup>31</sup> Peel, Gerald, *Isles of the Torres Strait*, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1947, p.127.

<sup>32</sup> *My Island Home*, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.



### Tentative forecast of T.I.'s future

The visitor, Lock, mentioned earlier<sup>34</sup>, speculated in 1949 about the future of Thursday Island:

*“What the future holds for Thursday Island is unpredictable. Its geographical position in relation to Horn Island is important, and due to developments in aviation, it must go ahead. Its climate is splendid; and in time, when tourists can fly from Melbourne to Thursday Island in one day, it will become a popular tourist resort, provided its hotels are renovated and brought up to date.”*



(Photo: Dept of Native Affairs)

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<sup>34</sup> P.281.

## CHAPTER 19

### Resumption of school after the War

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The reader is strongly urged to read the previous chapter on the state of Thursday Island after the War, and up as far as 1950. There had been much damage throughout the dwellings and other buildings of the town.

It is not known whether anyone, and if anyone, who, may have occupied the Convent and School buildings during the War. The brief summary given in the History of the Mission is: *“When peace came and the missionaries were able to return, it took some time to make the mission buildings habitable again. As for the Thursday Island orphanage, it was not re-opened.”* We learn in the Inspector’s Report of October, 1947, that the old school building was unusable due to war damage.

Various students recall 1948 as the year that school was back in business. What equipment there was is not known; but presumably the Sisters, like everyone else, made do with what they had, and improvised. In fact the school re-opened on August 25<sup>th</sup> of 1947. There was a thorough inspection of the School on 24<sup>th</sup> October by Inspector W. Baker who provided a three page written report.

#### Insights gained from the Inspector’s Report of 1947

The reader must reflect on the fact that the 28 children who had gathered at the school just two months after it re-opened were either new to the customs of a school or, if previous students, had been enjoying a sort of extended holiday since at least 1944 (when the Mission at Cooyar closed) and probably, in the main, had, for a long time, pleased themselves in many of their activities. There would have been few things over several years that would have demanded close concentration. Imagine the task of introducing habits of order, tidiness, concentration, customs of courtesy etc. We gain a glimpse of the situation in reading between the lines in the Inspector’s Report:<sup>1</sup>

*“Coloured children predominate roughly in the proportion of three to one. The extreme shyness noted elsewhere is not so marked here and, although general response is not really keen, children do make some mental effort. Parades are fairly well done and set tasks are with satisfactory concentration. Children have yet to learn that, on the completion of set tasks, time must not be wasted. They have also to learn that maximum effort is required in all phases of work. While it is evident that training in matters of courtesy is being given, much yet remains to be done. Children must be taught to stand when speaking or being addressed and to avoid the blunt “Yes” or “No” answer. The habit-forming value of insisting on tidy setting out of work is sometimes marred by the fact that careless untidy things are done in other parts of the book. Alertness is not of a high standard. There should be no need to repeat questions or orders. In view of all the circumstances, it is felt that the Sister in Charge has a big task which she is approaching conscientiously and energetically and it is confidently expected that government under her control will reach a good standard.”*

A thing that teachers hate was inevitably happening. Children were arriving to join the school and join classes that had already begun in dribs and drabs: *“Children from various sources have been arriving at intervals with the result that organisation, so far, is not very stable.”*

And while the enrolment at closing in January 1942 was 78, and in October 1947 was merely 28, the Inspector anticipated the figure to approach the previous total as people returned to the island. Indeed by November, 1948, it had grown to 54.

All the children were being taught in the *one* building only -- the former Infants’ building (directly below the presbytery). The previous main school building, *“is in a bad state of repair chiefly through war damage.”* The Inspector notes: *“In view of the possibility of an increased enrolment it would seem wise to have necessary repairs carried out.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Inspector W. Baker, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1947.



Keeping in mind that the school had only been in operation for two months before the Inspector arrived, some of his remarks appear churlish. For example, while he notes that the Sister in Charge knows her problems and is attacking them courageously and intelligently, and that *“Reading heard was of satisfactory fluency,”* he continues: *“Coloured children have a tendency to ‘slur’ their words and it would appear more than ever necessary, with them, to insist on careful enunciation even to the point of exaggeration.”* And in another part he adds: *“Knowledge of Formal Grammar in IV is very scanty. They are not sound in elementary principles.”* A bit difficult to expect if they have all been absent from school for almost three years and have only returned for two months!



A few more complaints include:

*“No Drawing is done. Copy book work in which pencil is used as far up as IV does not show sufficient care. Needlework has not been taken so far. Mapping should be done in books kept for the purpose. Home exercises were not up to the required standard.”*

### Insights from Inspectors’ Reports of 1948, 1949 and 1950

A year later, Inspector John M. Portley<sup>2</sup> is much more sympathetic and makes direct reference to the great interference and dislocation caused by the war:

*“The school is capably controlled. As would be expected from children absent from school during much of the war period, there is some restlessness: but there is a genuine desire to please teachers and to profit by opportunities offered. ... Difficulty was experienced in classifying new pupils, advanced in age. The school is now well organised. Pupils are grouped according to ability and are rapidly attaining proficiency in their work.”*

The children are now back in two buildings, so obviously the earlier suggestion of repairing the larger, main, building was taken up: *“The school suffered some damage during the war but the rooms are now clean and pleasant. Accommodation is adequate.”*

Given the extra year of schoolwork since the resumption of school the inadequacies so easily noticed by Inspector Baker in 1947 have been addressed:

*“Careful training is being given to overcome deficits in speech and to inculcate self-reliance and self-confidence in pupils. ... Reading and Recitation judged by ordinary standards were hardly fair, but progress is being made. Composition was rather good. Children express simple ideas freely and in correct form. Some progress is being made with the fundamentals of formal grammar. ... Writing throughout was very good.”*

Regarding physical activities, there are some changes in the customs of the school:

*“Physical exercises have been discontinued. Pupils are coached in Cricket and Football. Inter school athletic contests are arranged.”*

### Growing changes noted

By 1949 a number of matters appear in the Inspector’s Report<sup>3</sup> that had not been noted earlier. Whether these had been customs previously is not known. As the children march into school *“a march is played by one of the pupils.”* This was probably on the piano. At least one piano, and maybe two, were housed in the small front rooms of the convent overlooking the school grounds. A melody played there would have been easily audible below at street level where the assembly would have formed. And after Morning Prayers an Australian song was sung *“which aims at inculcating love of and respect for our country.”*

It appears that half-hour periods were the norm since the Inspector comments that that is too long a period for some children without some break in activity. It was mentioned that a number of children were shy and loath to express themselves, and also that *“Pupils play well together, and in the playground, there was no evidence of segregation or of discrimination.”*

<sup>2</sup> Inspection 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1948.

<sup>3</sup> Inspector John F. McGrath, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1949.



Further important changes are explained in the following part of Inspector McGrath's Report, and the interested reader will benefit by reading an extended passage:

*"The policy during 1949 has been to admit children as occasions required and 29 pupils have been admitted since the end of February. This has made normal progress very difficult as there appears to be a tendency to 'slow up' the work of the lower grades until the new comers have adjusted themselves. There are three Prep. Grades and it is most difficult to have the pupils work at each Grade covered systematically. Two Sisters are teaching full time, and a third Sister teachers part time since 3-10-49. Pupils may be grouped into three sections – white, coloured and Torres Strait Islanders. Each section is present in most classes excepting VII and V (1 pupil). A laudable attempt to obtain equal progress from each group has been made but the results indicate that in many subjects, much remains to be done. It was mentioned by Rev.*

*Mother that it is hoped next year to have separate courses for Islanders. If this be done and if craft work, manual work and allied occupational work be incorporated, progress should be made in both sections of the school but it would be essential to have more Sisters available to teach."*

The Inspector noted that "One Sister was a classified Teacher in the service of the Department." He continues:

*"Teaching methods generally are applied vigorously and with skill but the different intellectual levels in each Grade and the continued admissions have nullified much good work. ... Some Teaching Aids were observed and coloured chalk is used rather effectively. Mural decorations are in good taste and there is displayed a comprehensive and interesting collection of shells."*

There were only two girls in Grade VII and one in Grade V. The girls in Grade VII were well advanced and each was expected to do well in the up-coming Scholarship Examination.

Readers with teaching experience will recognise the following development:

*"Reading was Fair to V.Fair. Many interpolations were made and voices generally were monotonously flat. Some white pupils, who are in the minority, are imitating the monotone of the Islanders."*

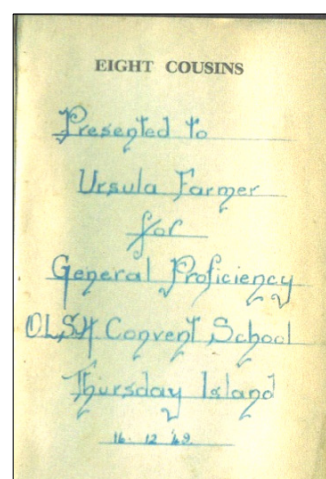
Drill has fallen by the wayside by 1949 but rounders, cricket and baseball were popular. And for the first time there is mention that "a wireless is available."

### Students' and teachers' recollections of school after the war

Margaret O'Leary, who recalled those days in 2011,<sup>4</sup> returned to school in October, 1948, going on to do her Scholarship exam in 1955. She remembers Sr. Rosaria as "an old tyrant." Sister Rosaria had taken the children to Cooyar in 1942 and saw them through the difficulties and privation of that period of "exile". She would have been a welcome touchstone of continuity for any children who had known her then and who returned to school in 1947.

The story is told by Margaret (recalling what she was told by her friend Ursula Farmer) that after the war the Sisters let it be known that they would take "anyone" who wanted to attend the Convent school, with the result that there was overcrowding to such an extent that the Sisters could not cope. She says that the Bishop intervened in 1949 and decreed that they should only take Catholic children. This created a considerable ruckus. The enrolment figures seem to confirm this. 1947 – 28; 1948 – 54; 1949- 69 and then 1950 – 39!

Sister Ruth Paton was a special presence in the convent and church at this time. She was a non-teaching Sister and remembers on returning after the war the church linen (altar cloths and altar rail cloths) were in disrepair and mending them or replacing them was one of her first tasks.<sup>5</sup> She also did the gardening under trying circumstances as the soil was so poor and the rains washed the good soil down the incline which she would then endeavour to bring back up in the dry season. Sister Ruth took a leading role in preparing for the liturgies in the church and made a special point of scouting out for the local native orchids as altar decorations.



<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry and written recollections, mid-2011.

<sup>5</sup> Phone conversation with Brother Barry in July 2011.



The grotto beside the church goes back to Sister Ruth's time and was built by her with the assistance of various children. Vincent Dorante<sup>6</sup> says that his father Frank was prominent in building the grotto. It was probably an ensemble effort, and it dates from the late 1940s or very early 1950s.

Ursula Farmer, as can be seen by her book prize, "Eight Cousins" was a student soon after the war. And it is interesting to notice how in tune with the lives of the girls (the European girls, at least) the Sisters were in the choice of book. This book was by the very popular girls' author, Louisa May Alcott, whose novel *Little Women* has never been out of print since first publication in 1868-9.

Ursula remembers being only at the school for the last half of 1949 but remembers:

*"School was fun for me and I loved being there. After school I played with Elizabeth [ ] and her sister Helen. We both had young brothers aged 5, not yet at school, whom we had to mind. There was a "shark proof" pool behind the hospital and we often swam there. We went to school every Saturday morning to catch up on our school work."*

Ursula Farmer and her friend Elizabeth were clearly the two referred to by the Inspector as doing very well in the Scholarship class. Ursula wrote in 2011: *"I only vaguely remember doing school work as it was all revolving around Elizabeth and me through the scholarship exam."* And when recalling the school buildings and children, she remarks, *"I can only think maybe 20-30 in the small hall they had. It was only Elizabeth and I in the small hut."* These figures seem to be after the clean out of the non-Catholic children!



Originally sent to the State school after achieving good results on the mainland, Ursula did poorly in exams at the end of 1948 and so her father, a non-Catholic, agreed "to let the nuns have her"! Ursula also tells of her studies in the Catholic faith and having her knowledge "updated" by Sister Francoise in preparation for her First Communion and Confirmation, as she had previously not attended a Catholic school. She writes:<sup>7</sup>

*"I made my 1<sup>st</sup> Communion on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1949, with my mother joining me after a long spell away from the church. Bishop*

*O'Loughlin came over from Darwin for a Confirmation ceremony on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1949, so the nuns wanted me to be confirmed as I could miss out in Brisbane [where Ursula was headed in the New Year.] It was a big night as he only came every few years. Mrs Kiloran was my sponsor. Mr. Kiloran was Mr. O'Leary's<sup>8</sup> Deputy."*

She goes on to say how the Sisters led her to a strong devotion to Our Lady which she continued though life. She especially remembers the *Hail Holy Queen*, *Memorare* and *'I'll sing a hymn to Mary'*.

Ursula found everything about the nuns and the church a rather exciting adventure: the bells, the candles and incense and the nuns in their white habits. She remembers particularly Sr. Francoise who was a very conscientious teacher and tried to get Ursula up to standard with extra contact, even on Saturdays. "Saturday Morning school", Ursula called it. She spoke highly of Francoise's dedication and hard work and found the nuns very nice. An amusing anecdote was fainting during Mass (maybe because of the fast) and being carried out of the church; and when she came to, seeing the white gowns of the Sisters and thinking she had gone to heaven and was surrounded by angels!

Elizabeth Osborne relates many of the improvisations of the Women in various islands of the Torres Strait made of materials to make do and get by during and immediately after the war. Most probably the Sisters, likewise, made the most of the limited supplies they would have had.

The racial mix of the school, as noted in the previous chapter, in 1949, was 4 coloured children to 1 white child.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry in August 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Written, July, 2011

<sup>8</sup> Cornelius O'Leary was the Head of the Department of Native Affairs, and the father of Margaret O'Leary, mentioned in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Extract from Report of Mr. G.K.D. Murphy, Regional Director of Education, dated 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1949, on education & school buildings on Thursday Island, p.24. [copy in the Qld State Archives]

An interesting aspect of the arrangement of instruction in the Convent School, somewhat forecast in the 1948 Report, is found in Mr. Murphy's Report<sup>10</sup>:

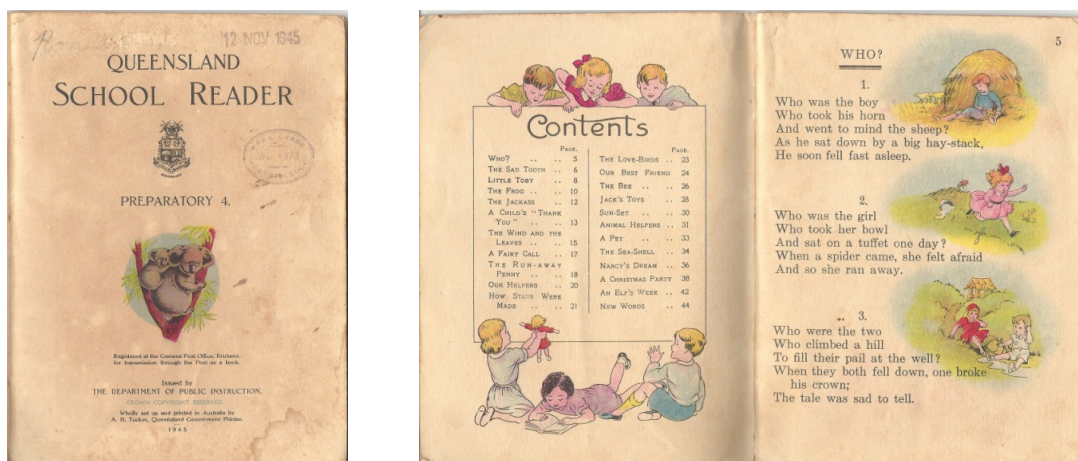
*"As from 1950 the white children of this school will be segregated from the coloured children. They will be taught the normal curriculum in a separate building within the grounds. The coloured children (both cross-breeds and natives) will be taught in accordance with a modified curriculum."*<sup>11</sup>

The Orphanage, taking children since 1889, after a brief re-establishment in 1948, ceased to operate and as a result the two storey orphanage building became available for school use.

And as the Inspector anticipated, two candidates were, indeed, successful in the 1949 Scholarship Examination.<sup>12</sup>

## New Readers?

Possibly with the resumption of school in 1948 the latest *Queensland School Readers* may have been introduced. The accompanying facsimile is from a 1945 edition. These Readers, begun in 1915, were compulsory texts and in the Syllabus of 1930 different books and sections of books were prescribed for different class levels.



The reader will notice the definite “Anglo” nature of the illustrations. And even the inclusion of the koalas on the frontispiece might suggest that Australian schoolchildren are white European. Of course, the vast majority of Australian schoolchildren *were* European and it is understandable that textbooks would reflect this.

But if, as is mentioned in the Report above, the children in the Convent School were segregated and “the coloured children” taught a “modified curriculum”, they may have been presented with stories and poems more appropriate to their culture. There were recurrent calls for such relevant stories for reading. Little is known at the time of writing about this modified curriculum, and, hopefully more will be found.

Also at the time of writing it is not known whether or for how long the “segregation” of children into white and coloured classes at the Convent school took place.



<sup>10</sup> P.25.

<sup>11</sup> Just what was in this “modified curriculum” would be most interesting to find out.

<sup>12</sup> Inspector's Report of 1950.





## CHAPTER 20

### St. Joseph's School, Hammond Island School, 1946-1964

#### War, evacuation and new life in Cooyar, 1942

In February, 1942, there was the tumultuous upheaval of the evacuation to Cooyar that is described in detail in another chapter. Father Doody had become the priest on T.I. and wrote on February 6th:

*"All the Sisters and children have gone down to Brisbane (Cooyar, near Toowoomba), from T.I. and all the women and children from Hammond have gone with them. As there were over ninety of them I thought it best to send Fr. Flynn along with them ..." "Hammond has been practically closed up – there are still about a dozen boys (men) over there, but they are nearly all working here in T.I. during the day..."*

And what happened to the Mission buildings during the war? We're indebted to Elizabeth Burchill<sup>1</sup> for some insight into this:

*"Under military occupation the presbytery building became the orderly room and the convent was used as the officers' mess. Nine-inch guns were pointed out to sea and although the weapons have long been removed the hilltop site is still [published, 1972] called Command Hill."*

#### Re-establishment after the War

While there was some activity on Hammond Island after 1942 we will fast-forward now to the return of different ones and the slow re-establishment of the Mission and the school.



In a centenary publication<sup>2</sup> by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart we read:

*"During the war white ants had a great time on Hammond ...Father Abbott came in 1945. In 1948 Father Doody bought army installations from the Radar Station. Out of a Sidney Williams hut he built some homes and patched the presbytery roof. A cyclone blew Fr. McDermott's old church down, and a new one was improvised. In 1947 Fr. McDermott returned again ... and next year [1948] Br. A. Howley was sent there. In 1949 Fr. P.Power went to Hammond, and 1950 Fr. Dixon succeeded Fr. McDermott ...The presbyteries on T.I. and H.I. were repaired, and when the convent on H.I. was made habitable by beings other than white ants two nuns came and took over the teaching from Br. Howley."* (Photo is that of Brother Andrew Howley.)

*"Only a minority of the original inhabitants returned to Hammond Island after the war, instead remaining in mainland cities and towns in north Queensland. The Sabatino and Dorante families were the first to resettle in 1947 and about six families were living there by the end of 1949."*<sup>3</sup>

#### Hoping for another Brother, 1948

Father McDermott wrote to his provincial in March, 1948:

*"I have been expecting a reply to my letter of early Feb. re the possibility of getting another Brother for Hammond Is. either to work with Bro Barrett or to replace him. We urgently need a Brother capable of undertaking the primary school, with the assistance, if necessary, of the Q'land Correspondence Courses which are supplied free to Missions."*

As it happened Brother Barrett returned and was joined by Brother Andrew Howley who arrived in August, 1948. He was said to have been an effective teacher and that in his time the number of students gradually increased.<sup>4</sup> Note that August is well into the school year. In February Fr. McDermott wrote: *"I was rather disappointed at not being able to start school at Hammond at the commencement of the school year."*

A little insight into the human nature of these two Brothers can be gleaned by some references Father McDermott makes in a letter from Thursday Island, dated 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1949<sup>5</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> Thursday Island Nurse, p.65.

<sup>2</sup> Matutina, Stella, *History of a Heritage, the Story of the Australian M.S.C. Province, 1854-1954*. Several roneoed pages. Source, MSC Archives, Rome.

<sup>3</sup> Shnukal, A.

<sup>4</sup> Littleton, p.61.

<sup>5</sup> Virtually all the letters quoted in this section of the history are taken from Deere's work, *Stone on Stone*.



*"Barrett was pleased to get your letter. He is very well as is also Howley. Sometimes when the fish refuse to bite or things are not so hot John {Barrett} remembers that he should have a retreat and says he is going to ask to go South. When the fish play the game again John forgets the south and everything is OK. The fish are biting well at the moment. ... Howley is doing good work in the school and by living in peace with John is atoning for past misdeeds and storing up treasures where there are no moths. John. Of course, continues to think that his coming here was a mistake when there is such a capable bloke as Bob Howley on the horizon."*

Brother Barrett finished at Hammond at the end of 1950 but Brother Howley continued till the end of 1953.<sup>6</sup>

In a letter from Bishop O'Loughlin dated June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1950, writing to Father Dixon<sup>7</sup> we read:

*"I have written to Mother Gerardine [the Provincial of the OLSH Sisters] about the return of the Sisters to Hammond, and expect a reply shortly. The usual arrangement in the Missions regarding erection and furnishing of Convents is that this is the burden of the Mission itself and not of the Nuns. ... Where the Sisters are concerned I would recommend you to be very generous, for any material help we can give them will never be commensurate to the assistance they render the work of the Mission."*



*Sisters from left: Florence, Marie Pierre, Mollie, Paula, Anastasia, Carmelita.*

(The photo of six Sisters on the Melbidir is taken from Gardiner, Anne, *olsh, The Flame of the North*, Colemans Printing, 2007 .)

### Some student memories

Sister Anastasia stands out in Reg Sabatino's memory<sup>8</sup>. *"You play up – you get it,"* is how he described Sister's approach. Concerts held on T.I. were also recalled, involving *"a bit of dancing"* that included jiggs and the Sailors' Hornpipe! Sister was remembered as strict but fair : *"very good."*

Other Sisters recalled included Sr.Mary Patrick ( later known as Mollie), Sr. de Lourdes and Sr. Carmelita.

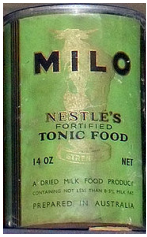
Hardships of childhood life of those times are vividly revealed in learning that each day before school, Reg and his sister had to row their father over to T.I. and then row back for school. Then after school it was row back over ... pick father up and row back again! And at other times he would take bananas to Mr. Farquhar's and cooked crayfish to the Grand Hotel to bring in a little more income for the family.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>7</sup> Letter held in the Presbytery Archive, Thursday Island.

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry, 2012.

Punishments for wrong-doing included cutting the long grass with a sickle or painting the many rocks around the gardens, trees or pathways.



However, unlike the disagreeable dugong oil that Mary Ben-Juda recalls being forced to drink each morning in the 1930s, Henry Garnier, recalling his 1950s schooldays on Hammond<sup>9</sup>, remembers with delight the glass of fresh milk and Milo all were issued with before school. Matthew Dorante's morning chore was as the milker of several cows on the island. The milk was delivered in cans to the school where Father would mix in Milo and everyone would line up for their enjoyable quota.

Henry remembers an ingenious scheme the Sisters had to get water delivered and wood chopped. The boys were divided into the Red and the Blue teams. And outside the Sisters Convent were two 44-gallon drums, one red and the other blue. Team members would bring water in smaller containers from a nearby well to fill their team's barrel, and the competitive spirit meant the Sisters always had the water they required. Henry was one-time Skipper of the Blue team. Similarly there were two piles of chopped wood.

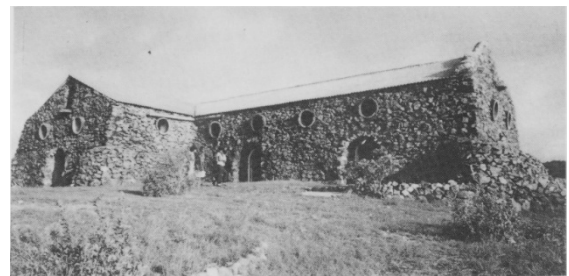


Many students would go home for lunch. But if the tide was right some boys might wag school for the rest of the day and take their spears to go fishing. As a peace offering they might offer the Sisters a fish that evening; but that did not prevent getting a smack the next morning!

With a resident priest on the island there was altar-serving to be done. Henry remembers he and other boys had "no hesitation" getting up and ready for Mass, dressed in red cassock and white, lace-edged surplice. The competitive spirit even spread to altar-serving with a keen desire to be first or clocking up the most times during the week. *"I really enjoyed serving,"* he said. The altar boys were treated to the occasional picnic on another island and once a month there was a trip on a Friday night to the cinema on T.I.

Sister Patrick (Mollie) Porteous was on Hammond Island for a time. She is quoted as writing: *"My time on Hammond Island was between 1951-1959. Things on the island were very primitive as the Sisters only returned after the evacuation during the War. Fresh water was always scarce and there was no electricity."*<sup>10</sup>

Part and parcel of school life during 1952 and 1953 was observing and taking part in the building of the most extraordinary church on the hill just to the sea-side of the cluster of school and church buildings. This amazing story is best told in Fr. Tyrone Deere's book, *Stone on Stone*.<sup>11</sup> A contribution from Sister Francoise was the drawing to scale of the door frames. And it was the custom for the women to prepare refreshments for "smoko" and for the children to take the goodies to the men.



At one stage in about 1953 Father James Raymond had to look after the Hammond Island school for six months *"in the temporary absence of the Sisters."*<sup>12</sup> Sr. Marietta Garnier remembers Fr. Raymond taking over.

A "new" school was built in 1958. And it was said:

*"The new school provides excellent accommodation for the Sister teachers and their pupils who previously had to endure certain inconveniences and discomforts. It will also serve as a recreation centre for all on the Mission. All who helped in the building of the school find satisfaction in a job well done. The opening of the school by the honorable, the Minister for Health and Home Affairs will be a red-letter day for the staff and*

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Gardiner, Anne, *olsh, The Flame of the North*, Colemans Printing, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.71.





*people of Hammond Island Mission and an occasion of gratitude to Mr. O'Leary and the staff of his Department<sup>13</sup> whose help and co-operation have made the school a reality.*"<sup>14</sup>

In the Report of July 1958<sup>15</sup> we read:

*"During his May visit to Thursday Island, Dr. Noble, Minister for Health and Home Affairs, officially opened our new school of two class rooms and a wide verandah. The school was constructed by the men of the Mission and is a credit to them. ... We are happy to report good progress in all branches of school work, in arts and crafts and in music. One girl is*

*boarding at Thursday island Convent for schooling in 7<sup>th</sup> grade with a view to training next year in commercial work. Mary Garnier is at St. Mary's College, Charters Towers, in Sub-Junior Class. Several children are progressing well as pianists and church organists. Sewing, cooking, housework and needlework tuition is given to the girls whilst canework, toy-making and elementary carpentry are taught to the boys."*

## 1954 Absence of Sisters ... help from Frs. James Raymond and Richard Docherty

Father McDermott returned to T.I. in June, 1954 and tells about the school situation on Hammond Island<sup>16</sup>:

*"I am settling in and tomorrow [22<sup>nd</sup> June] I will renew my acquaintance with Hammond Is. Fr Raymond has done a good job looking after both islands since Fr Dixon left especially as Hammond has been without Sisters all this year and he has had to look after the school there. We hope to have Sister Anastasia back from sick leave in Sydney shortly and then the Sisters will return to Hammond."*



Father Raymond left Hammond in 1955 for an appointment in Papua. Father McDermott wrote<sup>17</sup> at the time of Fr. Raymond's departure: *"Father Raymond has done a good job here and is popular with all, except some of the Sisters in whose eyes he can do nothing right."*



Appointed to the school in 1959 was Father Richard Docherty. He had previously established the Aboriginal Mission Station at Port Keats, but by the time he was asked to go to Hammond Island his health had deteriorated and he had turned 60. And so it was difficult for him to be asked to teach at the school for a short time, a task that he was said to have been unsuited to.<sup>18</sup> However he was held in high esteem by Father McDermott when he learned he was coming:

*"Father Docherty will be very welcome and I feel that his presence at Hammond will mean very much to that Mission and usher in an era of renewed spiritual and temporal advancement. He is a priest with many talents and varied interests who will soon win the respect and affection of the Hammond Is people and make himself at home with them."*

(It is he who was the builder of the grotto with the statues of Our Lady and St. Bernadette.)

## Students' memories

Marie Mosby (Sabatino) tells of a little mischief the children in Fr. Docherty's class would get up to<sup>19</sup>. Occasionally at the recess time they would sneak into the Sisters' garden and "pinch" some oranges which they would peel under the desk. Father Docherty could easily smell the strong citrus aroma and would come looking for culprits; and all would be obliged to show their hands above the desks. And if Father threw the chalk to gain attention, the children would pretend they had seen nothing and each would keep a straight face as if nothing had happened.

<sup>13</sup> The Department of Native Affairs. A short tribute to Mr. Cornelius O'Leary is given elsewhere in the history.

<sup>14</sup> This document has a handwritten note suggesting it was prepared at the time of the opening of the school.

<sup>15</sup> Presbytery Archives, Thursday Island.

<sup>16</sup> Deere, un-numbered pages.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.73.

<sup>19</sup> Conversaation with Br. Barry in 2012.

Marie also remembers the Sisters teaching fancy work and crochet work which she has continued through life. Numerous items were made for the various Fetes. Another creation was fans fashioned from banana fronds and decorated with coloured feathers ... that necessitated chasing the chooks for their feathers.



Other memories are of learning Irish songs and dances for concerts, and also performing concerts for visiting Government officials. A pleasant upshot of a government visit was the large welcome tin of lollies that would be left for the children. And at the time of the Crowning of Our Lady's statue at the end of May there would be the gathering of the wild native orchids to decorate the altar and prepare the "crown".

Camilla Sabatino remembers weekend chores included picking the burs and grass needles out of the nuns' habits.



The first Island dances Josephine David-Petero learned were in preparation for a big welcome to Bishop John Torpie when he visited T.I. and Hammond Island on becoming bishop of Cairns in 1968. The children, all dressed in costume were towed out on the school barge and "hidden" behind Deadman's island. When the launch carrying the bishop rounded the island the barge appeared with the children bursting into vivacious song and dance as a surprise welcome. Josephine also remembers both the words and the melody of a song/hymn that Sister Killian composed, as well as the custom to begin the day with the singing of the hymn, "*God Bless Our Lovely Morning Land*", the words of which will bring back memories for many children of that era.

God bless our lovely morning land!  
God keep her with enfolding hand  
Close to His side.  
While booms the distant battle's roar  
From out some rude barbaric shore.  
In blessed peace forever more,  
There to abide.

God Bless our lovely morning land ... Australia!  
God keep her with enfolding hand ... Australia!  
On earth there is no other land  
Like our enchanted Southern Land,  
Our own sweet home, our motherland ... Australia.

More precious than songs composed by others was a song composed specially by Sister Kilian for Hammond Island, as well as a Welcome Song:

#### Hammond Island Home

Isle amid azure seas, Hammond Island smiling  
'Neath the golden sun,  
The pearling luggers dipping in the breeze

Oh! Our home, our island home  
Hammond Island we love thee.  
May God's holy angels  
Hover near our children dear.  
May his holy mother  
Spread her mantle blue  
And keep them ever true to thee  
And bless, protect our island home.

When the years have passed,  
Let us all remember  
Those who gave their lives  
To teach us how to find out home above.

#### Welcome Song

Welcome, hearty welcome  
Oh! Welcome here tonight  
With joyful hearts we greet you  
And sing our happy song.  
We pray that God may bless you  
And all your works for him  
And may your children be blessed, too.  
Oh, welcome here tonight  
Welcome, Welcome!  
Oh, welcome here tonight.



Several descriptive passages of Hammond Island in the 1960s, including the school and children, are found in Elizabeth Burchill's *Thursday Island Nurse*<sup>20</sup>. They make rewarding reading. The following extracts are cut and pasted from several pages.

Hammond Island, away from the hustle and bustle of this 20th century, and protected by church and government, earned the name "Island For Children."

Nowadays more than 120 half-castes live at the settlement; more than half this number are under fifteen years of age. Families live comfortably in European-style timber houses. Some of the buildings are on stilts. The houses compare favourably with those of any other settlement in the Straits.

Hammond is a very rocky island but the inhabitants have worked hard to produce gardens: croton bushes, fruit-bearing paw paw trees, sweet potatoes, and runner beans grow around houses; rows of banana trees from a sloping hill top provide food for the settlement. Lime trees, decorative all the year round, grow well but other citrus trees are destroyed by white ants.

Frangipani trees bloom for most of the year. One of these trees near the presbytery bears trailing, wild orchid plants that have been grafted on to lower branches. The orchids range in colour from deepest purple to palest mauve and have yellow centres. They mingle beautifully with the exotic, sweet-smelling, cream and pink frangipani.

Bright purple bougainvillea cascades down the broad, white archway of the convent to shock the senses almost as much as the pervading smell of the frangipani. White-robed Sisters of Our Lady Of The Sacred Heart Order live within the convent and teach.

#### PARADISE FOR CHILDREN

THE BAREFOOTED ISLANDER on Hammond is serene and lighthearted. He appears to be without frustration or restriction and is not in any way adversely affected by the discipline in a Christian mission.

The school building of St Joseph's was opened in 1958 by the Minister of Health for Queensland, Dr Noble. It is in an elevated position facing south-east so that it gets the full benefit of prevailing sea breezes. The Australian flag flies from a tall, white pole in front of the school. Double flights of steps and wide verandahs lead into classrooms

that are brightly painted. Folding doors, when closed, serve as blackboards. A permanent stage has been built into the structure of the building and a piano provided.

The forty children attending school at the time I was on Hammond Island were taught to grade seven with a Queensland education curriculum. They spoke good English and could read and write well. Both boys and girls learn to play the piano and in singing, can harmonise beautifully in duets, trios and in groups. Handicrafts are encouraged; miniature wooden ships are carved; mats are woven; baskets and exotic fans are made from the dried leaves of the pandanus palm; senior girls and teaching nuns embroider snow-white pillowcases, handkerchiefs, and table mats.

After a picnic lunch visitors were entertained at a school concert. The children recited poetry, sang native and European songs in duets, trios and groups, and danced in traditional costume and with castanets. Mothers smiled happily at the enthusiastic attention lavished on their chubby, brown-eyed babies in arms. The babies in return gazed with puzzled wonderment at the strangers.

The pleasant climate, the sea, beaches, and bushland made life happy for the children of Hammond Island. They looked forward to swimming, fishing, spearing the occasional dugong, and helping to catch turtles sunning on the reefs. When tired of these activities they dug for turtle eggs in the warm sand. The teaching nuns trained their eager pupils in the competitive games, and at the combined school sports with the T.I. Convent School, Hammond Island children performed with distinction, smoothness, and precision.

On my regular clinic visits to the island from T.I. I was accompanied by Mary Durante. She assembled the lively children, pacified crying toddlers, answered questions, and handled Clinic record cards. The children generally were well-cared for, healthy, robust, and neatly dressed in good quality European cotton clothes. They were comparatively free of ugly tropical sores that disfigured arms and legs of less favoured, coloured children in tropical areas.

Hammond Island is a little known Australian sanctuary. It is an object lesson in providing the simple needs of happy living. It is a paradise for children and is apart from the world of automobile and television. Atomic bombs and other death-dealing missiles have no place on that tropical isle. May it remain as it is. A happy, innocent place.



<sup>20</sup> Extracts taken from pages 63, 64, 67, 69, 70, 73.



When the Sisters could not continue the school on Hammond, the children were brought over to T.I. each day by barge, towed behind the venerable Mission launch, "St. Joseph". The barge, having no shelter, sometimes the children arrived drenched. Occasionally the Sisters on T.I. would supply stand-by clothing to change into while their wet clothes were dried during the day ready for the return journey. The children were dropped at the Rose Hill landing and then walked about a kilometre to school. If heavy rain meant a lot of water at the Frog Gully crossing there was danger of slipping and falling in. If the seas were calm, Joe, the boatman, would sometimes drop the children at Bach Beach which would still necessitate a fair walk. And if the tide was out there was wading some distance in the water and mud before reaching the road. Marie remembers that while schooldays were happy, they were tiring.

TRINITY COLLEGE OF MUSIC, LONDON

STUDENT'S CERTIFICATE

THEORY OF MUSIC First-Steps Division

VERONICA JUDA


Pupil of OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART CONVENT

duly passed in the following subjects:—PITCH, NOTES AND RESTS, TIME, KEYS AND SCALES

FIRST-STEPS DIVISION MERIT at the LOCAL EXAMINATION

held at THURSDAY ISLAND in NOVEMBER 1961

On behalf of the Corporation,

  
*Wm. Kie*  
Chairman  
*J. M. S. J.*  
Vice-Chairman  
*C. A. Cork*  
Secretary

### Sisters can't continue; school continues with Father Docherty, 1965

*"The school attendance is good. Owing to a shortage of teachers on Thursday island and in other places, the teaching sisters who were here were transferred to Thursday Island. Father Docherty, himself assumed control of the school and to date has managed to keep things going well with the help of local island girls."*

<sup>22</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry, 2011.



## Hammond Island children attend school at OLSH, T.I., 1966

Finally, when Father Docherty became too ill to continue, it was time to temporally close the school on Hammond Is. and take the children by barge each morning to T.I. This arrangement continued through the rest of the 1960s and through the 1970s. To assist the children with their schoolwork on Hammond Island a “Night Study” arrangement was begun whereby teachers from both the Primary School and the Secondary School on T.I. would go over the Hammond to supervise study and help when required. Extracts from the Reports for 1969 and 1970 tell:

*“The evening study classes have been going extremely well this year [1969] with every child attending. Many teachers from both the Primary and Secondary School are helping in this matter. The Sisters come over also as well as taking study classes, also teach music to certain Hammond Island children.”<sup>23</sup> ... “the children are brought to Thursday Island by barge every day [1970]. All primary grades are now taught at the Sacred Heart School.”*

And during 1966 the Hammond Island Mission wrote to the Department of Native Affairs asking for an Australian Assault Boat to be able to ferry the children to T.I.



There are a number of photos<sup>24</sup> from the 1950s that vividly ring to life the vibrancy of school life on Hammond Island in that time.



<sup>23</sup> From lengthy Report by Fr. Miah McSweeney to the Bishop. Presbytery Archive, Thursday Island.

<sup>24</sup> From Peter Sabatino's collection.

A little detective work reveals on the blackboard behind the group of children singing, the writing in chalk at the top of the board of the motto of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (and of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart): “*May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved.*” Besides on the blackboard, the



Sisters would write this motto at the top of letters.

(First Communion photo shows, Back: Nora Bin-Juda, Father Owen McDermott, Joseph David; Middle: Josephine David, Agnes Sabatino; Front: Peter Sabatino. Approx. 1960. Photo from Peter Sabatino’s collection)

### Schoolday memories end 1950s, early 1960s

Thanks to a Memoir prepared by Peter Sabatino for this History<sup>25</sup>, we have some valuable insights into school life at the end of the 1950s and into the 60s. Peter clearly remembers the writing of “*May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved*” at the top of the blackboard, as mentioned above. He recalls the singing of “*God Save the Queen*” and the hoisting of the Union Jack at the start of school, and marching into school singing the Morning Offering: “*Jesus Lord I wish to serve Thee, and to you I offer this day ...*” accompanied by a student playing the piano. The Sisters Peter remembers are Srs. Cabrini, Claver, Patrick (later known as Mollie) Kilian and Marie de Lourdes.

Learning the piano from Sister Marie de Lourdes, Peter always thought that Sister was an accomplished musician. Years later, on meeting up with Sister, she confided to him that she was furiously trying to learn by correspondence ... keeping just ahead of the students. Having been asked to teach music on Hammond Island, in a spirit of obedience, she agreed and proceeded to learn.

The new school, Peter remembers, was divided into two classrooms, with a divider which was used as blackboards. Prep to Grade 4 was taught by one Sister and the other taught 5, 6 and 7.

No *Milo* for Peter’s classes as for an earlier time<sup>26</sup>, but a drink of milk, made from powdered milk, was issued each morning break. There were no school uniforms in those days and students walked home for lunch. The Sisters made toffees that they sold to the children. And as the Catholic Bazaar on T.I. approached the boys would take cuttings from the cottonwood tree to make model boats to sell at the bazaar.

Children of Peter’s time will remember Sister’s dog, Major. “*Students who misbehaved were either spoken to by the Sisters or given the cane! When Sister caned a student, Major would bark! He also growled and chased us when we approached the school grounds and when we left school to go home,*” Peter wrote.

In spite of the teaching of Jesus’ Beatitudes and St. Paul’s reminder that the greatest of the virtues is “Love”, there was teasing and bullying at school in Peter’s time, he recalls.

Peter’s summary of his estimation of his education by the Sisters on Hammond Island was expressed thus:

*“The Church, priests and sisters were very much part of community life on Hammond Island. I am deeply indebted to them for providing me with a strong foundation for my faith, educational an employment achievements in my adult life.”*



(Photo from Cecilia O’Brien’s collection shows the children singing for a visiting Minister)

<sup>25</sup> At the suggestion of Brother Barry in 2012.

<sup>26</sup> As told by Henry Garnier about a generation before.



Happily the Department of Education Inspector's Report for 1961 for "St. Joseph's Convent School at Hammond Island" has been preserved and is presented here in full for the interest of the reader.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

Queensland.

Report of Inspection of the St. Joseph's School at Hammond No. - Class -  
Convent Island

Inspected 3rd July, 1961	Present, 13	B. 19	G. 32	Total
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1. Records: 2. Government: 3. Organization: 4. Methods: 5. Proficiency and Progress of Pupils: 6. Care of Grounds: 7. School Games and Physical Exercises: 8. General Condition. 9. General Remarks.

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RECORDS: An admission Register, Glass Rool and Daily Report are kept.

GOVERNMENT: The school is firmly, yet brightly, controlled by a staff of two teaching Sisters. Both have had wide experience in special schools such as this school. Their insight into the capabilities of their pupils and their keen interest in the school have forged a bond of sympathy and understanding between pupils and their teachers.

Pupils are well dressed, particularly careful of personal cleanliness, and well mannered. They were alert and bright throughout the inspection.

ORGANIZATION: Accommodation is ample. There are two class rooms separated by a folding partition. The interior is lined and ceiled. Painting is attractive and furniture is indeed well kept. The environment of such a school as this must help pupils to appreciate the aesthetic side of life.

Classification: Classes and enrolments are: G.I (7) , G.II (5) G.III (6), G.IV (5), G.V (1) G.VI (9). In general the grading is indicative of the standard of attainment. G.VI has many pupils who in schools on the mainland would be in VII or VIII. However, the present plan of placing pupils newly admitted in G.I instead of in Preparatory has helped to made the ages of pupils in I and II normal for those grades. Their progress through the school will be watched with interest as their standard of attainment is good.

Work Books and Time-tables show thoughtful planning.

COURSES: METHODS: PROFICIENCY AND PROGRESS OF PUPILS:

Courses take in English, Mathematics and Social Studies at the standard of the 1952 Syllabus of the Education Department of Queensland. Art and Craft and Music are taken at a reasonable standard. Basket ball and Athletics are encouraged as recreations.

ENGLISH: A strength of the school is the extent to which pupils have gained a working knowledge of spoken and written English. Parents are encouraged to speak in English and children have some ability to speak English when they enter school. This is wisely fostered through picture talks, conversation, and oral answering of questions throughout the school. Poetry was well known but is desirable that the feeling of poems be brought out by careful phrasing and enunciation. Reading is strong throughout and the time is ripe for added reading of suitable supplementary books in school and for home reading of library books. Fine reading of lessons not previously prepared was found in grades II to



ST. JOSEPH'S. HAMMOND ISLAND.ENGLISH (continued)

could be culled to ensure that pupils learn only those words which they are likely to want for written expression.

Good attention is given to writing throughout. The linking of writing to reading and expression in G.I in print script and in G.II in cursive writing is on sound lines. Free written expression is commenced in III and shows development in IV and VI. In the latter grade pupils were able to write continuous accounts on topics of interest with fairly accurate spelling and punctuation. Word-building applying phonics is taken in the lower school and it is applied to derivation in VI. Simple grammar in IV and VI was pleasingly sound.

Some fine teaching aids for number facts are in use in G.I and G.II and in both these grades ready and accurate response to addition and subtraction tested orally was found. G.III have a good grip on number facts to 18. Extension tables on the lines indicated need to be thoroughly drilled in III and IV and continued in VI. Combined multiplication and addition along with the division with remainders are essential tables from G.IV. Tests showed these tables as of a fair standard and blackboard and written arithmetic tests given later indicated the need for greater soundness. Figures are neatly made.

The Flag is honoured daily and by example and precept pupils are being trained to citizenship. G.III and IV are wisely combined for social studies of Australia. G.VI take the full course for that grade and they were interested and had their facts well known.

In Art free expressive work could be given wider sway. Boys showed accuracy of representation of scenes with ships. Girls showed to advantage in colour and form in designs. Girls sew neatly. Boys have some fine basketry. This school did well in inter-school athletic competitions in current years. Pupils sing sweetly and part singing is encouraged. Some children are being taught to play the piano of which there are two on the Island.

(sgd) Norman E.T.Pyle.

District Inspector.

### 1964-1965, staffing crisis

In February, 1965, the new priest in charge of Thursday Island, Father J. Cosgrove, wrote:

*"Things have been a little difficult here (T.I.) of late. ... With the departure of the local Sister for the south I tried to get help locally even offering to pay a lay teacher. However I was unsuccessful. So we were forced to bring the Sisters over from Hammond Island. This did not entirely solve the problem as the Sister from there quickly realized that she could not manage all the grades in her charge so we had no alternative but to send grade 7 to the state primary school. This went very much against the grain but had to be done."*

### Children travelling to T.I., 1966

The accompanying extract from the *Torres News* of 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1966 tells of the children from Hammond Island now being brought over to T.I. by barge for school.

<p>Sister Mary Christopher and Sister Christopher Mary arrived last week to join the teaching staff of the O.L.S.H. Convent school on Thursday Island. The Hammond Island school and convent have been closed and the children of the mission are being brought to Thursday Island for schooling.</p>
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## CHAPTER 21

### The School in the 1950s

The school year of 1950 shows a roll of 39 children. As noted earlier, this contrasts with the total of 69 in the previous year, 1949. In their zeal the Sisters had offered to take *any* students applying in 1949, but were required by Bishop O'Loughlin to limit numbers to manageable levels by only admitting Catholic children.<sup>1</sup>

#### The school through the eyes of the Inspectors, 1950, 1951

The Inspector for 1950 tells of the composition of the 39 children:<sup>2</sup>

*“Out of the 39 pupils enrolled only 4 are white while the remainder comprise children of Japanese, Chinese and Malay or Island extraction. These children are being allowed to develop naturally but at the same time the Teachers are directing the children’s efforts towards correct training and worthy citizenship in the Australian way of life. The Teaching Sisters are sincerely desirous of promoting the welfare of the pupils. Training in patriotism, virtue and morality, the principles of truth are being placed before other considerations. Response varies greatly but a pleasing tone is in evidence.”*

There being only two teaching Sisters the Inspector suggests collapsing some classes to reduce their number. He notes that there is only one pupil in Grade III who could be placed in the next grade. He remarks that these two Sisters are enthusiastic and that preparation is thorough.

Something that has been noted almost through the entire history of the school is still in evidence and that is the difficulty most of the children experience in learning English. *“Many of the pupils have little command in the use of English.”* And it is urged that oral expression should receive greater attention and that the pupils must be *“encouraged to speak up and gain confidence.”* And in another place: *“There is a tendency for pupils to speak too softly.”*



(The sketch was provided by the Sisters' Archives in Rome and shows the Sisters' convent in about the 1950s. The dark quarter circle is the grotto, believed to have been built in the late 1940s or early 1950s.)

Other points of interest in the Report of 1950 include mention that Bookbinding is incorporated into craft work and shows “interest and proficiency”, and that singing *“is very tuneful and pupils appear to excel in this aspect of school work.”* The games played are *“Soft-ball, Basket-ball and the usual small school games that are enjoyed by the pupils under the supervision of the Teachers.”*

By 1951 there are 42 pupils. Inspector William M. Grant<sup>3</sup> notices the same mixture of children as in the previous year and the same difficulty of students expressing themselves in English and being shy and conscious of their poor ability to express themselves in good English.

Marching into school is still done to piano accompaniment (as had been done before the war) and a Morning Song is featured immediately after morning devotions.

Once again the Sisters are urged to reduce the number of class divisions they have placed the children in. The inspector notes that in Grades I to VI, and three Preps., there are 10 classes in all! And only 42 pupils.

<sup>1</sup> Reported by Margaret O'Leary from conversation with Ursula McElaren

<sup>2</sup> Inspector D. Cochran, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Report of 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> July, 1951.



And something we have heard before: *“An improvement in Oral Response will take time. The first steps should be to make pupils speak out. When pupils do answer it is difficult to hear what they say.”*

It was noted that the boys did fretwork and an interesting assortment of work was on hand. The school participated in inter-school sports in Football, Basketball and Softball and were about to take part in an Annual Sports competition.

## Students' recollections of the early 1950s

Margaret O'Leary has memories of schooldays from the early 1950s:<sup>4</sup>

*“The Sisters who were there in my time were two Principals, Mother Rosaria and Mother Florence; music teachers Sister Miriam and Sister Paula; and Sister Francoise who was a class teacher of the upper grades. Sister Ruth ran the convent and taught the girls dressmaking and sewing. The nuns were all kind, caring and valiant in their efforts to educate a diverse and largely financially poor group of children. Resources were very limited (before the days of State Aid)<sup>5</sup>, and the main resources were the talents and skills of the nuns.*

*“Memories of lessons in my earlier years were of learning tables by rote on the front verandah of the 'big' school, in order that Mother Rosaria could get a breeze. In the later grades, the nuns worked very hard, giving much personal attention to Scholarship candidates. My friend Patricia Treacey, who did scholarship with me, and I, had lessons after school in the convent, because all of the upper grades were in the one 'small' school, on the opposite side of the grounds.*

*“The nuns taught music for payment, and had since earliest times. My mother, who was born in 1903 and attended the school, learned music from the nuns, as well as elementary book keeping and commercial procedures. This was, I think, a good source of revenue for the Sisters and they also taught children who were not students at the school. I commenced music lessons with Sister Miriam at about 8 years of age, and continued with Sister Paula until I went to High School. We had a thorough grounding in theory and practical music, and throughout the years did exams through Trinity College of London (theory only) as no examiners came to the Island. I was prepared for practical exams through the AMEB syllabus, so that when I went to High School, I continued my studies as Junior and Senior subjects. A thorough grounding by talented teachers.*

*“School Uniforms were very much a hit and miss affair. I and some others wore a white blouse and navy pinafore, with socks and shoes, but most children did not, and went barefoot or wore sandals. Similarly for the boys: white shirts and shorts, but whatever they had was the normal uniform. Concerts were a big part of school life. Our elder brother Jack who was at school on T.I. for the first years of his school life said that when he left to go to Brisbane, all he could do was sing. Irish Dancing was another important skill acquired by the girls. I thought, until later in life, that Mother Machree was an OLSH nun. Many hours were spent in rehearsals and presentations, which I think the nuns enjoyed more than we did.*

*“Recesses and Lunch time activities were taken up with rounders: games which would continue for days; and in later years, basket ball, when a court was excavated by Father Dixon and the boys. As mentioned before, resources were very limited, and at that stage the school had no Radio, neither did the convent, so outside stimulation was limited. Sister Francoise taught the boys fretwork, a form of woodwork, which they excelled at.*

*“I do remember Mass on First Fridays<sup>6</sup>, a great devotion to the Sacred Heart and particularly to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and Benediction every Friday. Easter ceremonies were an outstanding time of the year, and the children took a very active part in the Liturgy.*

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<sup>4</sup> Writing to Brother Barry in June, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Which had to wait till the 1960s.

<sup>6</sup> There was a special devotion to “The Nine First Fridays”.

## Inspector's Reports of 1952, 1953

There is mention of a new syllabus coming in during 1952, and that two Sisters take the classes.<sup>7</sup>

Two school buildings are in use with VII, VI, IV and III being in one (18 children), and II, I and Prep (30 children) in the other.

An interesting note is that the children sing their own marching tune as they march into school. Besides noting that some children are shy there is also mention that, "*In some cases, the home environment of the pupils is not conducive to the production of homework of a very high quality.*" And while the Senior and Junior singing pleased the Inspector, he remarked that, "*The small people's action songs were most enjoyable.*" And, "*the basket-ball court is much used.*"

Under the heading "General Remarks" we read:

- "(a) *The collection of Library Books for both Senior and Junior Scholars is a very good one*
- (b) *Lessons in Health and*

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION QUEENSLAND				
Report of Inspection of the		Convent	School at Thursday Island, No. Class	
Inspected	10.11.53	19	Present, 22/28	B. 22/25 G. 44/53 Total.
1. Records: 2. Government: 3. Organization: 4. Methods: 5. Proficiency and Progress of Pupils: 6. Care of Grounds: 7. School Games and Physical Exercises: 8. General Condition: 9. General Remarks.				
<p><b>RECORDS.</b> Only children of school age should be entered in the Admission Register. Otherwise records are up to date, and accurate as far as tested.</p> <p><b>GOVERNMENT.</b> The flag should be honoured at some appropriate occasion during the day. Pupils represent a wide variety of races. They are happy and obedient, and some are reasonably responsive. A few of the older girls forget to stand at times when speaking at length, but in the main the general bearing of pupils is quite pleasing. The government of the Sister-in-Charge is cheerful, friendly and effective, and the one staff teacher is keen and co-operative.</p> <p><b>ORGANIZATION.</b> Both teachers commenced duty this year on transfer from a southern State, and they were thus unfamiliar with the Queensland syllabus. Under the circumstances they have had some difficulties, but under the circumstances they have made sound progress. All grades as far as Gd. VI are represented, and they are grouped under teachers as follows:— I, II and III; IV, V and VI. The grading of pupils in Gd. I is somewhat complicated, and they appear to be at various stages of the relevant course. It is recommended that in 1954 admissions be made at the beginning of the school year in accordance with the policy operating throughout the State, and that admissions during the year be avoided. As it is, it is felt that pupils of the normal Gd. I have lost some of the teacher's attention through having with them a number of pupils at various stages of progress. Schoolrooms are neat and tidy. The buildings are old, but as far as practicable they have been made attractive. Accommodation is sufficient. Work Books have been prepared in sufficient detail, and the Sister-in-Charge conducts regular and detailed tests. Some general comments on the progress of work could be placed on record. The school functions smoothly during the day on suitable time-tabling. The school does not submit a monthly return, and this matter might receive attention.</p> <p><b>METHODS.</b> In the infant room methods are bright and stimulating, and in due course a better response should be forthcoming from pupils. The Departmental spelling list should be used. Throughout the school oral expression is weak, and to some extent this is understandable. Pupils should be given every opportunity to speak about things within their range of experience, and it would be an advantage if all answers to oral questions were given in complete sentences. Some picture maps are in evidence as teaching aids, but the teaching of Social Studies in Gd. III calls for the greater use of pictures. Pupils make some picture maps in their note books, and the general standard of neatness in pads and records is normal. Some Natural History specimens are neatly kept in the senior room.</p> <p><b>PROFICIENCY AND PROGRESS OF PUPILS.</b> <u>English.</u> In general, this subject is below average. Particular weaknesses noted are: oral expression; spelling in Gds. I, II and IV; reading in Gds. I, II and III; synthesis in Gd. VI; no derivation has been taken with Gds. V and VI. Recitation is quite pleasing, and spelling and reading in the two upper grades are normal.</p> <p><u>Mathematics.</u> There is a wide variation between the oral and written aspects. Tables are below average in all grades, and the application of them weak. Pupils of Gds. I and II are not familiar with the terms halving and doubling, and basic facts in mensuration are sketchy in the two upper grades. On the other hand written arithmetic gives better results.</p> <p><u>Social Studies.</u> This subject is below normal. Upper grades work to the Gd. VI syllabus but progress is backward. More could be made of the civics aspect.</p> <p><u>Science.</u> The subject has not received very much attention.</p> <p><u>Art and Craft.</u> Pastel, needlework and cardboard work are taken, and progress is normal.</p> <p><u>Music.</u> The performance of the junior group is pleasing. In general the subject is up to normal standard.</p> <p><u>CARE OF GROUNDS.</u> The grounds are suitably kept.</p> <p><u>PHYSICAL EDUCATION.</u> Girls do commendable folk dancing, but there is no good reason why</p>				

*Hygiene are given*

(c) *The school possesses a highly interesting collection of beautiful shells and marine specimens."*

It should be noted that in 1952, Grade VIII was added to the Primary School throughout Queensland, but it was a couple of years before any convent children continued to that level.

In 1953<sup>8</sup>, not only were there no children in year VIII, there was none, indeed, in Grade VII. The bulk of Inspector Borebardt's differs little from other recent reports except to note that, "*Girls do commendable folk dancing, but there is no good reason why the boys should not participate.*"

<sup>7</sup> Inspector W. Bell, 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1952.

<sup>8</sup> Inspector T.S. Borebardt, 12.11.53.





### The Queen's Coronation, 1953

The "Hammond Island Mission" float is actually the Sacred Heart School float for the Coronation Procession on 1953<sup>9</sup>. The picture is taken on the T.I. sports field. It shows another example of the patriotic support the school showed, even though the occasion was very British. In the float Margaret O'Leary is in the position of the Queen, and Cecilia Sabatino is on the right of her as you look at the photo, representing Celon!

(Photo from Margaret Krijnen (O'Leary). The house in the background is that of the Director of Native Affairs in 1953, bordering on the Western side of the T.I. Sports Ground. The building was still there in 2011.)

### The school in 1954

In 1954 the school roll was 50.<sup>10</sup> In 1953 there was the urging, "*The flag should be honoured at some appropriate occasion during the day,*" and now in July, 1954, we read, "*The morning assembly is well conducted, the Flag is honoured, the National Anthem rendered, and the march into school is brisk and orderly.*"

While there were students in Grade VII in 1953, there were still no students in the new Grade VIII. And while the boys were said to not take part in Folk Dancing, we read in 1954, "*Both boys and girls do Folk Dancing very creditably.*"

And we learn in the following year<sup>11</sup> that one student from the 1954 class won a Scholarship.

The introductory section of the Inspector's Report for 1955<sup>12</sup> will assist in gaining a part impression of the school in the mid-1950s:

*"The assembly of children on Parade is prompt and steady and their response to the bell signals is good. The Flag is honoured while the National Anthem is rendered on the school piano by a senior girl pupil. Marching to classrooms is performed to the accompaniment of the piano music and, though the marching is orderly, there could be more precision. A Morning Offering is sung delightfully in reverent manner and the singing of an Australian Song is well done. The children, nearly 90% of whom are coloured, present a very neat and well-kept appearance in their school uniforms, and though they are a little shy and soft-spoken, they are well-mannered and well-behaved. The Reverend Mother and her one assistant teaching Sister are training these children soundly in the acquiring of good social, moral and school habits."*



There is the first mention, since its introduction as the final Primary year in Queensland schools in 1952, of a Grade VIII class.

(The pictured letter, postmarked Thursday Island and dated during 1954, almost certainly written by one of the convent Sisters, was found on the net and is from Turnbull's interesting booklet.<sup>13</sup>)

<sup>9</sup> Since Mr. Cornelius O'Leary provided the Dept. Of Native Affairs truck for the Convent float (his daughter was attending the Convent school) it would have been inappropriate to use it for Catholic church business. But since Hammond Island was more the responsibility of the Dept. Of Native Affairs it was said to be for their use. Children from Hammond Island would most assuredly have been part of the Catholic float. The coronation was that of Queen Elizabeth II.

<sup>10</sup> Acting Inspector W.C. Jordan, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1954.

<sup>11</sup> Inspector's Report, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1955.

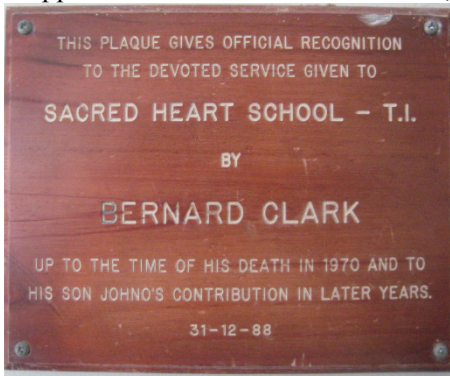
<sup>12</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1955. Inspector's signature illegible.

<sup>13</sup> Turnbull, James, W., *The Postal History and Postal Markings of Thursday Island*, Melbourne, Royal Philatelic Society of Victoria, 1990. Taken from posting from this booklet on the net.

## Dramatic interlude

This dramatic story of 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1954, has a number of connections to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School. Notice in the press report that the Sisters were amongst those who were tested for the correct blood type. We can imagine the children asking excitedly, “Sister, Sister, is that lady going to be alright?”

Bernard, the husband of the mother giving birth, Mavis Clark, was a very strong supporter and worker for the school, so much



so that there is a plaque in the school remembering his generous contributions over the years.

And the child born, Robyn Clark, subsequently attended the school and later married local, Johnny See Kee, and continued to live on

the island for the next fifty or so years. Robyn is featured in the school photo of about 1961 reproduced later in this chapter. Mavis, the mother, too, lived on to her old age.

**WOMAN'S LIFE  
SAVED**

**AT THURSDAY  
ISLAND**

**BLOOD FLOWN FROM  
CAIRNS**

**THURSDAY ISLAND,**  
Sept. 7. — Nearly all the island's 1500 population was blood-typed by doctors on Monday in an effort to obtain a rare blood needed to save the life of Mrs. Mavis Clark, who gave birth to a daughter early on Monday morning.

The search was unsuccessful but two pints of the required blood arrived late on Monday

after a 600-mile flight by the Cairns aerial ambulance. Today the woman was pronounced out of danger and her daughter is doing well.

As Mrs. Clark's condition deteriorated rapidly on Monday doctors began a search for her blood group, B.R.H. negative. Among the donors were nuns who came from their convent. Businessmen closed their shops and went to the hospital offering blood. Many natives were also typed and fishermen put back to shore when they heard the news. All transport on the island was used to take people to the hospital for blood typing.

Following a radio appeal by the woman's husband, 43 crew members of a tanker moored near the island were unsuccessfully tried. The arrival of the blood at 5.30 p.m. saved the woman's life as she was then sinking fast.



(The press facsimile is from the *Cairns Post*, 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1954, p.5, the plaque from the wall of the school and the photo of Bernie Clark on an army jeep is from Robyn See Kee's collection)

## Vice-regal visit

The *Townsville Daily Bulletin* of 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1954<sup>14</sup>, forecasts the visit of the Governor of Queensland, Sir John Lavarack and Lady Lavarack for October 18<sup>th</sup>. And the proposal is for their Excellencies, on 10.30a.m. of that day, to inspect, at the Town Hall, the children from the State, the Convent and Waiben State schools.

## To return to the Inspectors' Reports

A most interesting development noted in the 1955 Report is the following:

*"The senior girls of the school attend Mothercraft lessons at the Baby Health Centre on one day of each week during the latter half of the year. It is recommended that, in the New Year, consideration be given to the incorporating of lessons in General Science as set out in the Syllabus."*

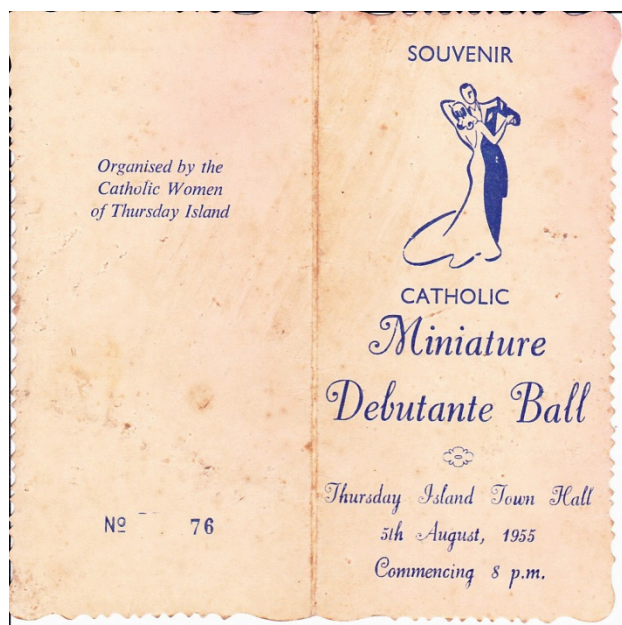
Just to emphasise a particular matter that the patient Sisters had as a recurring challenge over many years, a number of points from the Inspector's Report are here quoted:

*"Reading is very fair, on the whole but there is need to encourage the pupils to speak out clearly – on many occasions I had to stand quite close to a child to hear what he or she was saying; similar position exists in Recitation, particularly in I where it was practically impossible to hear some children. Reading for Content gave only fair to very fair response. Writing is very fair in II and Print Script has been given a good start in I where some very fine examples were seen. Answers in sentences should be encouraged and Dramatisation of short pieces should be commenced. In the teaching of Written Expression the oral question and the sentence answer should be followed up in Grade III; the use of the full-stop and careless mistakes in spelling need watching and careful re-writing by the pupils."*

<sup>14</sup> p.9.



In the list of subject areas the Inspector commented on, “Written Arithmetic”, “Social Studies”, “Geometrical Books” etc, appeared a most strange one: *“Demons and Contradictions”*. It is not known, at the time of writing, what this referred to. Singing came in for special praise: *“It is a delight to hear these children sing; from the very smallest child to the eldest there seems to be a gift for retaining of tune.”*



MINIATURE DEBUTANTES		MINIATURE	
presented to		DEBUTANTES	PARTNERS
The Fairy Queen:		Salina Lewin	Francis See Kee
Miss Margaret O'Leary		Sue Witts	Des. Houston
		Janice Bruce	Alan Strutton
With Her Attendants:		Connie Ward	Ken Woodhead
Miss Sandra Dyson		Marie Commerford	David Nicholls
Miss Leslie Lewis		Jacqueline Ah Mat	Daniel Ratcliffe
Miss Veronica O'Connor		Marjorie Ah Boo	Denis Galora
Miss Sandra Johns		Sarina Shibashki	Nasser Ah Boo
		Annette Lewis	Benny Ben Juda
Train Bearer:		Vicky Drummond	Horace Seden
Master John Treacy		Christine Drummond	Peter Ah Mat
		Sandra Wheate	John Clark
Flower Girls:		Lynette Hunter	Don Farquhar
Dianne Pearsall		Elaine Ah Mat	Peter Ah Mat
Lynette Clark		Elizabeth Chin Soon	John See Kee
		Frances Loban	Harold Hedges
		Lilian Elarde	Arnold Seden



In 1956 there were 74 children on the roll, almost exactly half and half, girls and boys. Two teaching Sisters taught all the classes. The Inspector of 1956 suggested that, *“News Talks of a few minutes’ duration might be attempted daily and that a few Speech training exercises be taken.”* The same Inspector with the illegible, but decorative, signature was the return Inspector in 1956.

His comments on most matters were very similar to those of his earlier report, but “Basketry” was mentioned for the first time as an aspect of Craft in the upper school and raffia work in the lower grades. But big news was the mention of the purchase of a radiogram! Or at least of the consideration of same. There also exist in the school archives two letters from the Department of Public

Instruction; the one of 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1956, addressed to Mother M. Florence and the other, of 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1956, addressed to “Madam”. The first offers a subsidy on the purchase of a radiogram up to the value of 26 pounds plus two pounds ten for each speaker. The second letter rejects an un-named claim the Mother Superior had applied for but repeated that radiograms were subject to subsidy. So presumably, a radiogram was purchased in the latter part of 1956.

Let us note the most popular songs of 1956 and surmise which ones may have been spun in on the new Sacred Heart School turntable: *Singing the Blues* by Guy Mitchell; several songs by Elvis Presley: *Don’t be Cruel*, *Heartbreak Hotel*, *Hound Dog* and *Love Me Tender*; *Memories Are Made Of This* by Dean Martin; *The Green Door* by Jim Lowe, *The Great Pretender* by The Platters, and *Hot Diggity* by Perry Como. Maybe *My Prayer* by the Platters may have appealed to the Sisters, or *Teenage Prayer* by Gail Storm. The Sisters could have been quite “hip” and “with it” at the time. And as happens, it is probable that children would bring records to school to ask if they could be played. (Fifty years later a third of the songs listed were being played at the Karaoke nights at the Torres Hotel, not 200 metres from the school.)

Whatever the speculation about popular music of the time, it is worth noting that the world had changed by 1956. The “teenager” was now a force to be reckoned with, and though the children at Sacred Heart School were mainly pre-teenagers, the world they were entering was unlike any in the previous history of the school. The modern age had arrived. The privations of the post-war years had generally gone and new horizons were opening up.

The photo shows the Altar of Our Lady specially decorated with drapes and flowers in 1955. This was a common practice for many years for special Feast Days of Our Lady, and especially during May. Sometimes the statue was crowned with a ringlet of flowers, or flowers were laid at the foot of the statue. The hymn sung on these occasion was “Bring Flowers of the Fairest” and in 2011 this was still the hymn sung on this occasion.



The photo is of Sister Ruth Paton in her latter days. She is the one who helped build the Grotto and who would gather the native orchids for the May processions.



(It may be slightly interesting to note that the stands holding the vases of flowers were still in use on the sanctuary 55 years later.)



TUESDAY 16th APRIL 1957. TORRES NEWS. PAGE 5

SCHOOL CONCERT.

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of their Order, the Sisters of Our Lady Of The Sacred Heart convent organised a little afternoon entertainment for mothers and friends of the school children.

It was held in the school hall last Friday afternoon, and the only children participating were from Grades one, two, and three. They have to be commended for their splendid performance.

The Programme was as follows.

1. Opening Chorus.

A Fairy came a dancing.  
Funny Little Men.

2. Infants- Grade 1.

The Pieman- Recitation.  
Ten little Indians.  
Mary Had a Little Lamb. Songs.  
Action Songs.

3. Grade 3

Two Little Kittens. Recit.  
Drill.  
Clap dance.

4. Grade 4.

Michael and the Duck. Recit.  
Lavenders Blue. Song.  
I had a little Nut Tree. Song.

5. The First Christmas. Drama.  
Characters.  
Shepherds.

Terry Brown Emmanuel.  
Denis Galora Jacob.  
Bobby Brown Ruben.  
(The cripple)

Peter AhMat Issac.  
Danny Lewin  
David Oai.

Choir of Angels.

Clara Bin Juda. Announcer.  
Janice Clark.  
Tina Drummond.  
Margie AhBoo.  
Koreen Mills.  
Ellie Titasey.

The Holy Family

Donald Mills The Infant.  
Elizabeth Chih Soon. Our Blessed Lady.  
John Clark. St. Joseph.

Hymns played by Patsy Peddel.

The Sisters wish to express their thanks to all the parents who assisted in any way, by lending toys etc and to all who showed their appreciation by attending.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

BISHOP RETURNS TO PAPUA.

The newly consecrated Catholic Bishop of Eastern Papua, Bishop John Francis Doyle, will return to Samarai on April 25th.

Bishop Doyle will be remembered by old Thursday Islanders as Father Doyle, who was parish priest here for many years before the war. In 1951 he was appointed Prefect Apostolic to the Samarai mission and on the 25th February 1957 was consecrated Bishop of Eastern Papua.

Before leaving for his diocese Bishop Doyle will spend a week at Downlands College, Toowoomba, where he was a former Rector.

## Celebratory concert, 1957

The Sisters celebrated their 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday as a Religious Order during 1957. Their Order, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, was founded in 1874 and it was merely ten years later that several Sisters set out for the far-off Pacific, and, as it happened, Thursday Island. Part of the celebrations was a “*little afternoon entertainment*” by Grades One, Two and Three, for mothers and friends of the school children.

Thanks to Gwen Moloney we have the programme of items which will be of enormous interest to any who remember the concert and their children and their children's children.<sup>15</sup>

Reproduced here, too, is an account of a “First Communion” ceremony from 1957.

The Easter Vigil Mass was forecast in a note in the Torres News of 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1957, and it was said, “*This will be sung, with the Convent school children singing the Proper parts of the Mass.*” Those who know the traditions of the Catholic Church of that time will realize that the language would have been

Latin and the melody, Plain Chant, the ancient melodies of the Church ... a very sophisticated form of singing for children!

FIRST COMMUNICANTS.

Rev. Fr. McDermott celebrated Mass at the Catholic Church last Sunday, during which 14 children recieved their first Holy Communion. The school childrens choir sang throughout the Mass and their singing is a credit to the Sisters who taught them. After Mass the parents waited on the children at a breakfast which was held at the school. The first Communion Cake was made by Mrs. Rowe. In the evening the children recieved the Brown Scapular.

First Communicants were Terence Maguire, Philip Bowie, Robert Brown, Michael AhMat, Tony Ward.

Florence Mills, Catherine Rowe, Janis Clark, Noreen Mills, Julie Ah Boo, Jennifer Baira, Modesta Mayor, Ann Filewood, Elaine Ah Mat.

<sup>15</sup> *Torres News*, 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1957.

## Gwen Moloney, her place in the story of T.I. and the School



Not only Sacred Heart School, but Thursday Island itself is enormously indebted to Gwen Moloney. From 1957 to 1988 Gwen was the “Recording Angel” of the island and its citizens. Big events and small were carefully and lovingly recorded and broadcast through her modest, yet enormously popular publication, the *Torres News*. Gwen described the publication as not so much a “real newspaper” but rather, “Just a community newsletter to let people know all the things that were going on.”<sup>16</sup> ... “I had a typewriter and an old Gestetner duplicating machine and I just started typing what I knew at the beginning of the week and kept on adding to it till we went to print.”

In 1964 Gwen was out of action for two months when she suffered a stroke that took from her the use of her left arm. She resumed her typing with just the one hand and continued doing so till 1987 when a favourable offer to sell her *Torres News* came up.

Gwen’s homely presence, however, continued for some time in the “new” *Torres News* through her weekly column, “Gwen’s Pen”. She continued, too, to be a vivacious hostess to numerous parties, entertaining all at the piano, but now with just one hand.

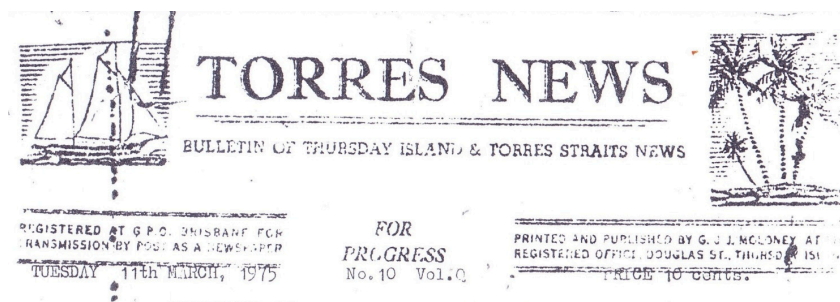


Gwen received numerous civil awards for her community service over 60 years, culminating with the award of the Order of Australia in 2001.

from  
Gwen's pen

Monday was the day for printing<sup>17</sup> followed by a “session” for collating when women friends would call around to the home and work on the collating together. Besides the opportunity for a good yarn, Gwen’s helpers were also rewarded with an excellent lunch. Then husband Joe, who had a transport and delivery business, would deliver the copies to the newsagent and the hospital kiosk and the other outlets. When the overworked Gestetner broke down Gwen would call on Col Jones at the newsagency, who could fix anything, to quickly nurse it back to working order.

Through her close association with the Sacred Heart parish and school her reporting of the doings of all and sundry on T.I. very often featured the comings and goings of members of the Catholic community, the Sisters of the Convent, the priests of the parish and the children of the school. First Communions, Confirmations, Processions, Sports days, Concerts, Raffles, Fetes, Dances, Balls ... all were recorded in detail. As a result the historian of the Sacred Heart parish and school finds great detail of the story from the pages of the *Torres News* from 1957 to 1988. The accounts of the School Concert and the First Communicants and the Break-up Picnic are taken from the first year of publication, 1957. Gwen died on T.I. in 2001 at the age of 82.



<sup>16</sup> *Townsville Bulletin*, 1994, article by Mary Vernon

<sup>17</sup> Information provided by Pat Jones in conversation with Brother Barry in October, 2011.



Above is the masthead of the *Torres News* at the time of Gwen Moloney's ownership and editorship and page 2 of the issue of 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1957, its first year of publication, is reproduced here for the interest it contains regarding school picnics of the time as well as an example of the layout, typing etc.

TUESDAY 10th DECEMBER 1957
TORRES NEWS
Page 2

### BREAK-UP PICNIC.

On Saturday last the children of the Convent school with their parents were treated to a breaking-up Picnic at the Catholic Mission on Hammond Island. Soon after arrival the women folk were busily engaged in preparing the picnic necessities of mounds of sandwiches and cakes, while the children from town and those from the mission entered into inter-school competition, playing the ever popular game of Rounders. With the fielding side always numbering about sixty, more than orthodox batting was required to penetrate the densely packed off-side and on-side field.

After lunch under the shady trees, there was a quick succession of foot races ranging from the tiny tots to the married women, and old Buffers. The Hammond Island boys won the inter-school Relay race, this writer dare not pick the winners of the married women's race. In the old Buffers (Mens) race there was a dead heat for first in a photo finish between the Clergy and the P.M.G. Dept. Some P.M.G. supporters claimed that the Clergy was too quick off the mark, but this is definitely denied. It is reported that neither have properly recovered.

Before the afternoon "snack" in which 6 gallons of ice cream disappeared in record time the Hammond Island children treated the visitors to a very interesting and entertaining concert.

There are a few worth while incidents worthy of being handed on to posterity. First of all by reason of constant watchful care, practically all the mission mangoes are still there, then at lunch those opening bottles of

### BREAK-UP PICNIC.

"Lolly Water" was successful in stopping an onslaught from about 250 children, and finally that unknown little boy who told the Director of Native Affairs when he was playing rounders "Hey, white man, you're not much good."

Thanks are extended to the I.I.B. the Harbour Master, and Mr. J. Dunwoodie in making their vessels available for the transport of the picnicers to and from the missions and to all those who made donations of money and goods and did all the work that made the picnic possible and such an enjoyable day for all who participated. Special mention is made of Mr. Chas Clarke who brought the ice cream over.

-----  
W A I B E N      S C H O O L  
PICNIC.

On Thursday last, 5th Dec, the children of the school had their annual "breaking up picnic at Horn Island. The Dept. of Native Affairs made the patrol vessel "Melbidir" available for the day to transport the 150 children, parents and teachers to the island.

The ship left the main jetty about 9a.m. to traverse the short distance to the accompaniment of the children's excited voices in song. Following the consumption of a large quantity of eats and soft drinks, the playing of games, swimming and hiking the "Melbidir" departed with all aboard for a short cruise to the back of Goode Island returning to T.I. at about 4.30p.m.

On Saturday night, 7th Dec. the Committee of the school arranged a Xmas Tree for the children, complete with Santa Claus who apart from losing gallons of perspiration under his heavy costume, did an excellent job, entertaining all present. About 140 presents were tied to the tree, these were distributed by Fr. Christmas to an excited crowd. The evening concluded with refreshments and impromptu dancing by some of the women.

## Inspector's Observations, 1958

By 1958 the enrolment of the school had reached 84. Inspector Jordan who had inspected the school in 1954 returned in June, 1958, to conduct an Inspection.<sup>18</sup> Part of his Report reads:

*"The two teaching sisters control their eighty-four pupils very well indeed and the behaviour of the children in the classroom and in the school grounds reflects credit on the administration. Both sisters are very active and enthusiastic in their duties and receive willing cooperation and deep respect from their pupils."*

*"They have succeeded in welding together these children of European, Asiatic and Island strains into a happy, social and industrious school group."*

*"The enrolment is increasing steadily year by year and has now reached 84. All primary grades are represented of which the Mother Superior takes IV to VIII, and another sister takes I to III. Both sisters have a heavy teaching burden. It is considered that the enrolment has reached a stage where the employment of a third sister would bring much benefit to the teaching. To relieve, at times, another sister in the convent takes Reading in Grade IV and Handiwork in Grades IV to VIII. ... Accommodation in the Parish Hall which is used as a school room is spacious and comfortable, but in the building occupied by Grades IV to VIII conditions are rather cramped, and the teacher finds it impossible to move freely among her pupils. Both sisters have given considerable attention to brightening their rooms with pictures and friezes, maps and teaching aids, and surroundings are clean and tidy."*



It is interesting to note that the methods used in teaching are, *"progressive in trend."* There is also mention of *"Rhythmic drills"* and also that, *"Gymnastic skills are taught to the boys with skill being shown in the formation of pyramids."* And further to the radiogram of 1957, further technological advances are in prospect: *"The purchase of a strip projector is being considered. This should provide a useful aid to teaching."*

First communion photo (approx. 1960) shows Sister M. Annunciata and Sister M. Claver. Front: Michael Bin Juda, Paul Calahorra, Patricia Bro\_\_\_, Halina Pekos; Middle: Pete Maloney, Pam Bowie, Nancy Anderson, \_\_\_Newman; Back: Aug Tibay, Philip Bowie, Francis Ah Mat, Joan Ward.



The Callahorra family was from Spain and Paul, in the front row, second from left, is shown wearing the traditional Spanish boy's manner of dress for First communion.

In 1960 the school was visited again by Inspector W.C. Jordan.<sup>19</sup> Since his previous visit when he recommended that an extra Sister be added to the teaching staff, there are, indeed, now three Sisters. This was begun in 1959. (It slips back to two Sisters in 1961.) He notes also that spoken English has improved:

*"In a school such as this too strong an emphasis cannot be laid on speech. Teachers are working hard in this regard with the result an improvement in enunciation and spoken English is noted. The pupils are reading and speaking louder than was noticed at previous inspections."*<sup>20</sup>

Poems were learned for recitation and there was some dramatisation. There was also the observation of some verse speaking. A suggestion was made for Lecturettes and Debates for VII and VIII. For the first time "Roots" were mentioned, and noted to be fairly well known. It's interesting to reflect that this is a very Euro-centric aspect of English; and it might give rise to amusement picturing these mainly Islander and Asiatic children learning that "thermal" and "thermometer" are from the Greek, *thermos* -- heat, and that "filial" is from the Latin, *fillius* and *fillia* for son and daughter etc. Formal adverting to these Greek and Latin roots was something peculiar to Queensland Syllabuses.

<sup>18</sup> Inspector W.C. Jordan, 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1958.

<sup>19</sup> Inspection 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1960.

<sup>20</sup> Cecilia Sabatino (O'Brien) remembers that the rule was that once entering the school grounds it was speaking in English only. If you were heard speaking Creole, you were "in strife". Readers will have different opinions about this, but some children at the time, in later life, became appreciative, as it allowed an easier entre into mainstream Australian society and work.



The reader may enjoy reading the Inspector's Report for 1959 in full:

11

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION	
QUEENSLAND	

Report of Inspection of the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Convent School at Thursday Island No.        Class       

Inspected 24th September, 1959. Present, 34 B. 44 G. 78 Total.

1. Records: 2. Government: 3. Organization: 4. Methods: 5. Proficiency and Progress of Pupils: 6. Care of Grounds: 7. School Games and Physical Exercises: 8. General Condition: 9. General Remarks.

Records are neatly and correctly kept. The admission number of each boy might be underlined in red for easier reference.

Government. The Mother Superior and two teaching Sisters control the school well. High standards of behaviour are required from the pupils and they are being trained to be obedient, courteous and friendly. Parades are orderly, the Flag is honoured, movements to class-rooms are brisk and each school session is preceded by prayers which are reverently recited by the children.

Organisation. The Mother Superior teaches Music and Singing, and the remaining subjects are shared by two Sisters. One Sister has 39 pupils in Grades IV to VIII, while the other teaches 43 pupils in Grades I to III. The Sisters occupy separate buildings, the Junior School being very crowded.

Work-books are written in detail and the Time-tables are satisfactory.

Mural Decoration is extensive, especially in the Junior Room, which in previous years was occupied by the upper section of the school. There is a good collection of shells on display in the Senior Room.

A School uniform is in use, and is popular with parents.

Methods. The Sisters are earnest in their efforts and strive to improve the standard of achievement by the pupils. Preparation for the day's work is regular and correction of written exercises is carefully carried out. There is a need for constant revision in all basic subjects, so that the tables and spellings of previous grades are not forgotten. The development of good clear speech is the major scholastic task in this school, which contains children belonging to several races. Children should be trained to give oral answers in complete sentences and to enunciate so clearly that they are heard and understood by their class-mates. When reading aloud, the pupils should have the books in such a position that the voice is projected

Director-General of Education,  
Department of Public Instruction.

N.B.—Report to be continued on back hereof.

P.I./S.7.

Govt. Printer, Brisbane

FOLLOW-ON SHEET.

(2)

outward rather than downward. The noisy habit of "clicking" fingers to attract the teacher's attention should be eliminated.

Progress and Proficiency of Pupils. Oral Reading was fluent, but in most grades was lacking in expression. Recitation was best in Grade III. Verse Speaking was Good in the upper grades. The Comprehension of reading matter was difficult to test, because the children were either unable to understand questions or could not express themselves clearly at any length. Written Expression was fair in most grades; much careful training in correct sentence construction is necessary. Writing in Transcription and Copy-books was Good, showing careful training. Home Exercises should be written at least once per week. Spelling results were spoiled by the lack of knowledge of words which should have been learnt in earlier grades. Analysis and Parsing were Very Fair to Good in Grade VIII, Fair in other grades. Numeration and Tables require much revision in all grades. Written Arithmetic was best in Grades VIII, VII, VI and II, but in several of the other grades, results were very disappointing.

Social Studies was taken regularly and Mapping is Very Fair. Pastel Drawing using the mode of Free Expression was Very Fair. Singing in both unison and part was very pleasing. Needlework was neat and a variety of articles was produced.

Grounds are small, but good use is made of the level areas for team games by the pupils. Little can be done in the way of gardening as the soil is not good and water is not plentiful.

Physical Education is carried on regularly, the pupils learning game skills and Folk-dancing as well as rhythmic exercises.

General Condition. Very Fair.

General Remarks. (1) The Library is used.

(2) Two pupils are being prepared for this year's Scholarship Examination.

*A. N. Whitmore*

Northern Regional  
Director of Education.

Director-General of Education.

(N.B.—Report to be continued on back hereof.)

E.D./S.S.





A truism is reiterated in the Report: *“Written Arithmetic will not improve unless tables become better known.”* In Social Studies it is suggested that project work, both individual and group might be undertaken. Good practical work is being done in needlecraft and the boys are doing fretwork and chip carving and making miniature furniture, while the junior grades are doing wool and bag crafts. It’s noted that these various crafts are skilfully done. Interschool games are played in Soft Ball and Basket Ball, and the school takes part in inter-school athletics.

And yet another advance in the use of technology is found in the procurement of a new 16mm sound projector.

(The Sisters did occasionally escape the routine of school and the convent. The photo of the four Sisters is held in the Cairns Diocese archives. Its date is 1957 and is said to be a picnic. The back of the photo says the Sisters are: Srs Anna, Claver, M. Pierre, Kilian and Damian.)



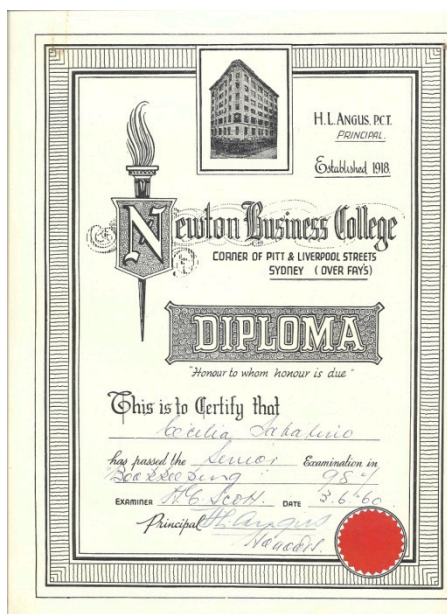
It is noted in the Report, too, that one student is doing a commercial course.

## Miscellaneous doing of 1959

In July the results came out for the exams for Half-Yearly Examinations from the Newton Business College, Sydney. They are copied from the *Torres News*.<sup>21</sup> The arrangements for these Commercial studies were that

they were classes for post-school students, including some who had not previously been students at OLSH school. Classes were mainly conducted on the verandah of the school (at the Douglas Street building) with Sister setting some work and then returning to her class of children in the school proper. Typing was practiced on the verandah of the Sisters’ Convent.

First Communion was celebrated in July and the *Torres News*<sup>22</sup> drew attention to the fact that Peter Callahora “was attired in traditional Spanish First communion costume, a gift from his grandmother in Spain.” His brother, Paul, is shown in a First Communion photo earlier in this chapter, wearing this outfit.



### JUNIOR TYPEWRITING.

Noreen Bin Awel.	Pass
Neville Newman	Pass
Janet Nichols	Pass
Cecilia Sabatino	Merit
Emilia Takai	Merit
Nola Ward	Merit
Snowden Wilkins	Pass

### ELEMENTARY SHORTHAND.

Neville Newman	Honours
Janet Nichols	Merit
Cecilia Sabatino	Honours
Emilia Takai	Honours
Nola Ward	Honours
Snowden Wilkins	Pass

### JUNIOR BOOK KEEPING.

Noreen Bin Awel	Pass
Denis Mills	Honours
Neville Newman	Merit
Janet Nichols	Merit
Cecilia Sabatino	Merit
Emilia Takai	Honours
Nola Ward	Merit.

Dianne Clark . Shorthand speed,  
60 w.p.m.

In September a Concert “in aid of the O.L.M.C. convent” was so successful that a repeat performance was called for.<sup>23</sup> It featured both adult and child performances. Amongst the children’s performances, “the tiny tots won all hearts with ‘Peggy O’Neil’. ‘Susie’ gave the chorus girls another opportunity to score while the Tinies and Johnny won well earned applause with ‘Oh Dear What Can the Matter Be’.” Island dances were also a feature of the concert, indicative of a growing inclusion of indigenous culture in the school curriculum.

<sup>21</sup> *Torres News*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1959.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, July 28<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 8<sup>th</sup>.

The Convent school children commenced the guard of Honour in the annexe of the Hall and the Waiben State and State school continued into the main Hall.

After the official party were seated on the stage, two little girls from the Convent school, Patricia Winterbotham and Georgina Anderson, both dressed white with pink and blue ribbon sashes ascended the stage and presented Lady May with a beautiful bouquet of orchids and ferns. Lady May was greatly taken with the paintings on the satin ribbon which tied the bouquet, these were scenes painted by a Sister of Our Lady of the Sacred Convent.

In October His Excellency Sir Henry and Lady May Abel Smith met all the school children in the VMI Hall.<sup>24</sup> As can be seen by the extract from the *Torres News* of Oct 27<sup>th</sup>, the children of OLSH school featured prominently in the welcome of the Governor and Lady Abel Smith. And it would be wonderful to think that the sash tying the bouquet might have been kept and the name of the “Sister of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Convent” known.

Later the Governor visited the Mission Fete and was taken on a tour of the stalls and made some “purchases and investment.”<sup>25</sup>

The Commercial Results of the second half of 1959 were posted in December<sup>26</sup> and while a number of students gained “Honours”, two who stood out were Emillia Takai and Nola Ward, each gaining 100% in the Intermediate Book Keeping exam.

The pupils’ Christmas concert of 1959 was a great success and featured, inter alia, a junior percussion band, Grade One folk dancing, precision drilling with flags by the seniors and a Nativity play. At the end of the concert certificates were presented from the Newton Business College and the London College of Music, the Sisters were thanked for their prodigious work, and not only was each child given a gift but they also each received cake and drinks.

Regarding the Nativity Play one former student<sup>27</sup> recalls her amazement at how the organizers managed to place children dressed as angels with wings, high up near the ceiling in the old Town Hall, where the concerts were held at that time.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., October 6<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., October 27<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Dec 15<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Cecilia O’Brien in conversation with Brother Barry in 2012.





## CHAPTER 22

### The School in the 1960s

#### Some highlights of 1960

In February it was announced that Congratulations were most sincerely due to **Miss Mary Garnier** of Hammond Island “who is the first girl born on a Torres Strait island to pass sufficient subjects to obtain a Junior Certificate.”

Jive had arrived on T.I. Twenty-first century readers may have to *Google*<sup>1</sup> “jive” to learn what jive was. But on T.I. everyone was doing it. It featured in the St. Patrick’s Day dance in March, 1961, and a special

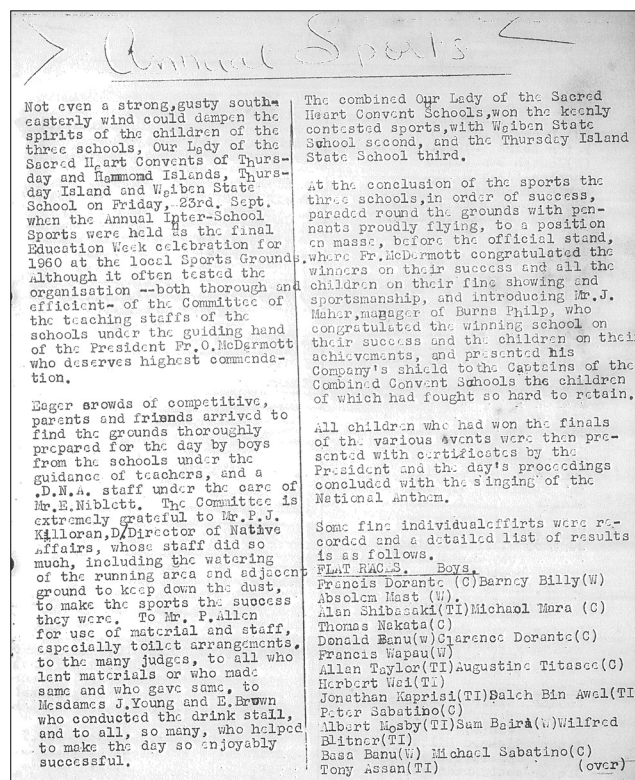
jive contest was part of a Dance & Social in aid of OLSH school in July.<sup>2</sup> Another Jive Night was arranged by the Children of Mary in October, 1961.<sup>3</sup>



(Dance photo from Robyn See Kee’s collection.)

#### Youth Recreation Club

A Youth Recreation Club, an outside school hours facility not conducted by the school, was set up and various write-ups of its activities appeared in the *Torres News* during 1960,<sup>4</sup> though it lasted for some years after that. At one stage 36 boys were said to be attending, and at another time, 40. Convent school boys were amongst them as Peter Callahora recalled<sup>5</sup>.



The Club was mainly conducted by Gerry Holmes and Bert Wooley who had previously had experience in circuses in England. They were assisted by Peter and Paul Callahora’s father, Andy, whose army experience provided him with skills in drill. The Club operated in the Shire Hall and attracted a wide variety of boys. Everyone mixed in together. Activities included the spring-board and vaulting horse, parallel bars and pyramids. There were about 6 boxing bags and boys were trained in boxing by Snowy Whittaker who had won the Golden Gloves for Queensland. Following training there were tournaments held in the “Buff” (Buffalo) Hall covering the whole range of weights and ages from Juniors to Seniors and Heavyweights.

Indeed Boxing was a source of revenue for the school through a Boxing Tournament that was arranged in August. The advertisement advertising the match was signed, “Wallop.”

<sup>1</sup> The term *Google* may need explanation for future generations. At the time of writing (2012) Google was one of the world’s most popular “search engines” on the internet. It was possible to seek information about virtually anything in creation by typing it into Google.

<sup>2</sup> *Torres News*, July 12<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, October 3<sup>rd</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, July 19<sup>th</sup>, September, 27<sup>th</sup>. Also see 1961: May 9<sup>th</sup>, August 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Conversation with Br. Barry, February, 2012.



The Inter-school Athletics Meeting in September saw OLSH school come First! A champion athlete at about this time was Philip Bowie who went to Brisbane to compete in the State championships where he excelled in High Jump.

(Photo shows Philip jumping in 1965<sup>6</sup>)



A beautiful commemorative certificate was presented to each child at the conclusion of the festivities.

The happy First Communicants were:

Michael Bin Jude,	Helena Piskos
Peter Holmsey,	Jean Ward,
Augustus Titasey	P. Bowie
Paul Callahora	Fay Newman,
Patricia Winterbotham	
Pauline Seden	
Francis Ah Mat	
Nancy Anderson	

First Communion was celebrated in October, 1960, and the description of the decoration of the altar and the white outfits of the children<sup>7</sup> also mentions that Sister Annunciata accompanied the choir at the organ. The names of the children are attached.

TUESDAY 27th SEPTEMBER 1960

TORRES NEWS

PAGE 5

Sports Results

**FLAT RACES BOYS**

Richard Mills (W) Dennis Galora (C)  
 (C) Danny Lewin (C)  
 Peter Baira (W) Granger Motlop (W)  
 (W) Joseph Banu (W)  
 Charles Billy (W) Horace Seden (C)  
 Kevin Ahwang (C)  
 Jacob Abednego (TI) Stephen Phincasa (W) Alo Tapim (W)

**RELAY RACES**

Junior TI. W. W.  
 Intermediate C. W. C.  
 Senior W. TI. C

**BALL GAMES**

Junior W. TI. TI.  
 Intermediate C. W. W.  
 Senior W. C. TI.

**Corner Spry.**

Junior W. W. TI  
 Intermediate C. TI. W  
 Senior W. TI. C

**Tunnel Ball.**

Junior W. TI. TI.  
 Intermediate C. TI. C  
 Senior TI. W. C.

**High Jump.**

Junior Wilfred Blitner (TI)  
 Toby Bantahel (TI) D. Whalboat (W)  
 Inter. Philip Bowie (C) Peter Ahmat (C) George Drummond (TI)  
 Senior Kevin Ahwang (C) Ariag Depoma (W) Jacob Abednego (W)

**Broad Jump.**

Junior Wilfred Blitner (TI) Salah Bantahel (TI) Henry Lewin (C)  
 Inter. Richard Mills (TI) Dennis Galora (C) Sowco Bro (W)  
 Senior Jacob Abednego (TI) Kevin Ahwang (C) Horace Seden (C)

**FLAT RACES GIRLS.**

Matilda Toby.  
 Ann Abednego (TI) Victoria Bon (W)  
 Barbara Amber (C)  
 Frances Ahmat (C) Ami Cook (W)  
 Valerie Mooka (W)  
 Nancy Abednego (TI) Elthias Mcne (W)  
 Marie Nakota (C)  
 Lacy Abednego (TI) Ina Gela (W)  
 Suberia Asa (TI)  
 Betty Cook (W) Kallang Kris (TI) Patricia Sabatino (C)  
 Patricia Padgill (TI) Susan Adams (TI)  
 Dolphina Kapri (TI)  
 Patricia Solomon (TI) Pauline Amber (C) Alice Lai (W)  
 Mary Dorante (C) Poniah Whap (W)  
 Bakoi Bpluz (W)  
 Sciama Lewin (C) Pauline Ronsch (W)  
 Florence Mills (C)  
 Yvonne Drummond (C) Johanna Tatipata (TI) Marcela Blanket (W)

**SKIPPING RACES**

Junior Betty Cook (W) Ellen Mills (C)  
 Patricia Sabatino (C)  
 Inter. Alice Lai (W) German Lai (W)  
 Pauline Amber (C)  
 Senior Yvonne Drummond (C) Mary Dorante (C) Florence Mills (C)

**RELAY RACES.**

Junior TI. C. W  
 Inter. W. C. W  
 Senior C. W. TI.

**Goal Throwing.**

Junior Lacy Byrne (TI) Carol McGath (TI) Josephine Bawic (C)  
 Inter. Ellie Titasey (C) Tina Drummond  
 Mary Marou (W) Rensana Gctawan (W)  
 Senior Yvonne Drummond (C) Florence Mills (C) Johanna Tatipata (TI) Lizzic Mooka (W)

**BALL GAMES GIRLS.**

Junior Corner Spry. TI. Ball  
 Inter. C. TI. C. W. TI. W. TI. C.  
 Senior W. C. C. C. C. TI. W. TI. C.

Peter Calloraha recalls Sr. Annunciata as “a very nice lady” and remembers that she would send away for sheet music to Scotland ... to Jimmy Shand’s!<sup>8</sup> Father Cosgrove, too, he recalls, was a very fine musician. And because the Callahoras lived behind the nearby Torres Hotel, virtually “next door” to the presbytery, Father Cosgrove would frequent their home and music would be enjoyed in the home with records being played on a radiogram. Sister Annunciata taught piano and violin in the small front rooms of the Sisters’ Convent on each side of the front verandah. And though she was not familiar with the piano accordion, she did give Peter Callahora lessons in that instrument. These lessons were mainly after school.

The Dance in October -- “Funds in aid of the S.H. Mission” -- featured a Bamboo Dance, Hula Dance and a demonstration of Maori Dancing.

## End of Scholarship exam

During 1961 it was announced that the Scholarship exam, that had been part of Queensland school life from the end of the nineteenth century, would cease. The exam had come in for increasing criticism. Because there was a monetary reward in gaining a Scholarship, it was found that some teachers and schools “taught to the exam,” neglecting, it was said, *real* education.

**ALTERATIONS IN STATE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

**Abolition Of Scholarship Examination Test**

**Raising Of School Leaving Age Also Recommended**

BRISBANE, Oct. 16.—Abolition of the State Scholarship examination as a qualifying test for entry to secondary education in Queensland has been recommended by a Government-appointed committee.

The committee's interim report was adopted in broad principle by Cabinet to-day.

The committee has also recommended raising the school leaving age in Queensland from 14 years to 15 years.

Raising of the school leaving age to 15 is recommended as soon as practicable but not later than 1966.

The committee recommended that the new scheme for secondary education should be implemented in 1964. This would mean that the Grades VII and VIII of 1963 would transfer to secondary school in 1964.

<sup>6</sup> National Library of Australia (on the net)

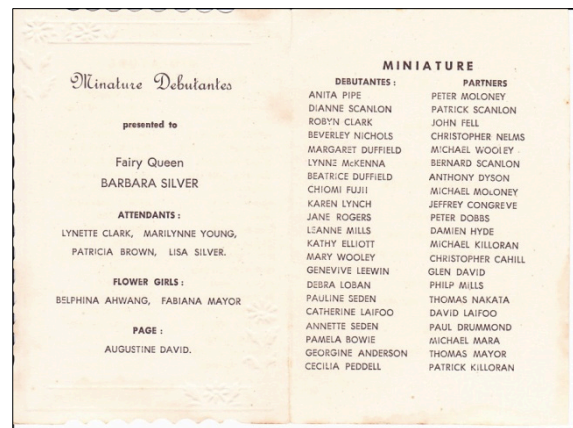
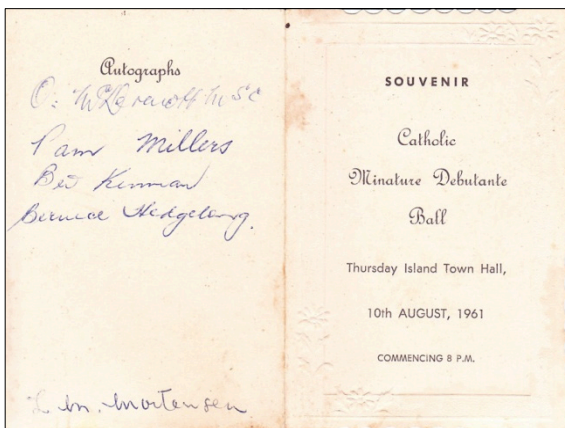
<sup>7</sup> Torres News, October 11<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Br. Barry, February, 2012.

## School in 1961

Mother Gemma, the then Provincial of the Sisters, visited the community and school. Mother had previously been on T.I. and she took the opportunity to visit acquaintances.

A “Miniature Debutants Ball” was a feature of August. The attached description from the *Torres News*<sup>9</sup>, almost certainly written by Gwen Moloney, will give an excellent idea of what it was like, and recall happy memories for those who were there and interesting imaginings for their descendants into the future.



“A packed hall witnessed the 21 graceful Debs being presented to the Fairy Queen, Miss Barbary Silver. The Grand Parade commenced at 8.20pm; it was preceded by the page, Master Augustus David, flower girls, Misses Belphina Ah Wang and Fabian Mayor, the Fairy Queen followed with her attendants, Misses Marlynne Young, Lynette Clark, Lisa Silver and Patricia Brown.

“After the party had taken their seats in the fairy bower, set on the stage, the tiny debs entered and paraded around the hall before taking up their positions for the presentation. The Debs were announced by Master Bruce Radke.

“Each Deb was led the the steps by her partner who then proceeded to the opposite end of the stage to wait until she returned to curtsy to him after her presentation. Both then returned to their places. At the conclusion of the presentations, all danced the Veleta and a folk dance. To conclude the programme the fairy queen and two attendants, L. Clark and L. Young returned to the centre of the hall to entertain the group with a Solo dance.

<sup>9</sup> August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1961.



*Father Mac. Made a short speech in which he thanked all for coming along to make the evening such a success, also the mothers for all their hard work entailed in the beautiful frocking of each deb. He then thanked the debts. For their excellent performance and the organizers for their many helpers. Nissi Mendis took the official photos after which the party adjourned to the Lavarack Hall for supper. Kev. Hyde's Band then took over for the adult section of the dance programme.*

*"Pride of place on the beautifully decorated supper table, was the Deb. Cake made by Mrs J.Young and decorated by Mrs K.Shibasaki, this was cut by the Fairy Queen and each deb. Received a portion. Supper room decorations were the work of Mrs J.Markey. The doll which was raffled was won by Mary Davis of the Coolibah Café. School funds will benefit to the amount of 125 pounds."*

In August the Inter-School Sports were held on Hammond Island. Waiben School won with 258 points.

Readers may need reminding that at this stage there were three primary school on Thursday Island and it was these three that were competing: The Convent School, Waiben School for coloured children and Thursday Island State School. As we will see the Waiben School and T.I. School will combine in 1964.



### Opening of "New School", 1961

*"A large group of parents gathered at the O.L.S.H. church to attend the children's Mass which was held at 9.30a.m. last Tuesday. After Mass the children in procession, led by the altar boys, walked up the hill to the new school. As all assembled at the foot of the stairs, Rev. Father McDermott with the altar boys went through the new building blessing the schoolrooms. Nissi Mendis took photographs of the various grades and also of the children as they sat at their desks. After the official photographs were taken parents were escorted through the rooms and shown the work of the pupils."*<sup>10</sup>



Then, when Bishop O'Loughlin visited the school in February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1961, to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, he blessed the new school-rooms.<sup>11</sup>

(The "new school", the converted old Orphanage building, being blessed by Father Owen McDermott from the steps. Also is seen Fr. Cosgrove, the Sisters and children. The other photo is of Robyn Clark in the school uniform of 1960.)

*"In 1961-2 the orphanage was converted to a school and blessed as such by Bishop O'Loughlin in February of that year. History records show that work on the play area was carried out with voluntary labour under the supervision of Mr. Pat Killoran, the present [1984] Under-Secretary of the Department of Community Service, without earth moving machinery."*<sup>12</sup>



<sup>10</sup> *Torres News*, September 5<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1962.

<sup>12</sup> *Our First Hundred Years*, un-numbered pages.

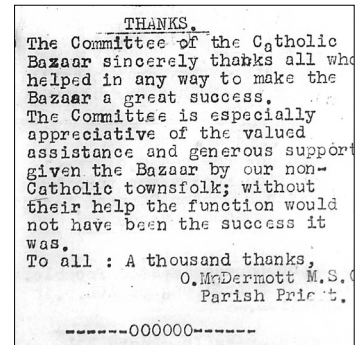
## Farewell to Father McDermott

Intimately intertwined with the history of the school and church for many years is the life and ministry of Father Owen McDermott ... over a period of 33 years. On 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1962 there was a Farewell gathering at the Town Hall attended by a wide representation of the community of Thursday Island. Father Mac, as he was known, had been asked by the Bishop to take up a role in Darwin. Many tributes were paid. *“All spoke highly of Father Mac. and his work for both the people of T.I. regardless of colour or creed, and his great interest in the general welfare of the island itself.”*<sup>13</sup>



## Thanks to non-Catholic helpers

Part of the community spirit of these times is reflected in the cooperation of different sections of the T.I. community in school and church events as seen in the attached inclusion in the write-up of the 1961 Catholic Mission Bazaar.<sup>14</sup> And in the write-up of the 1962 Fete we read: *“Thank you also to our many non-Catholic helpers and supporters. To Canon Rogers and Rev. MacNicol for loan of materials and to the Torres Hotel for keeping the soft drinks in cold storage and issuing them as requested we say many, many thanks.”*<sup>15</sup>



## The new catechism, 1962

After much discussion and planning at official levels far distant from Thursday Island a new Catechism was written for Catholic Primary children in Australia. Rather than just containing question-and-answer, as was the format of the previous “Penny Catechism”, there was greater emphasis on Scripture and understanding, as can be seen from the extract reproduced here.

The 1960s was a period of much discussion amongst Catholic educators as to the best way to convey Christ’s teachings and the traditions of the Catholic Church to young children. Learning catechism answers by rote fell out of favour and greater engagement with Jesus in his person and his message was the approach being adopted. The long-standing motto of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (the Fathers) and the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (the Sisters) – *“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved”* – was taking on a new relevance, and a new emphasis. In the opening of the accompanying Teacher’s Book we read part of the rationale:

*“His [Jesus’] teaching was not academic, bookish; it was vital, with the vitality of real life. He knew and He used the Scriptures which his listeners also knew and used, but not as an academic exercise. He immediately entered by His teaching into their lives, met their minds, challenged and enlightened their ignorance.*

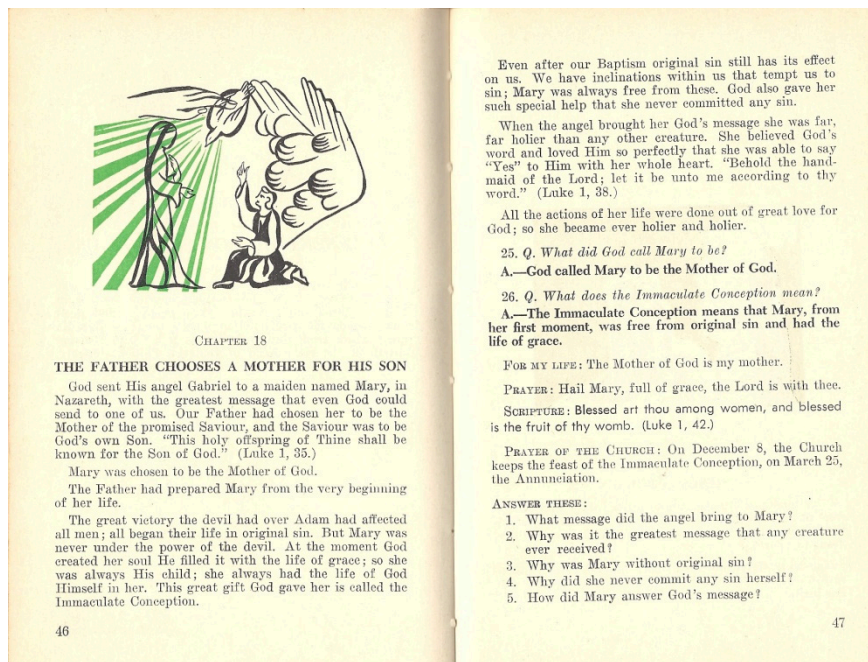
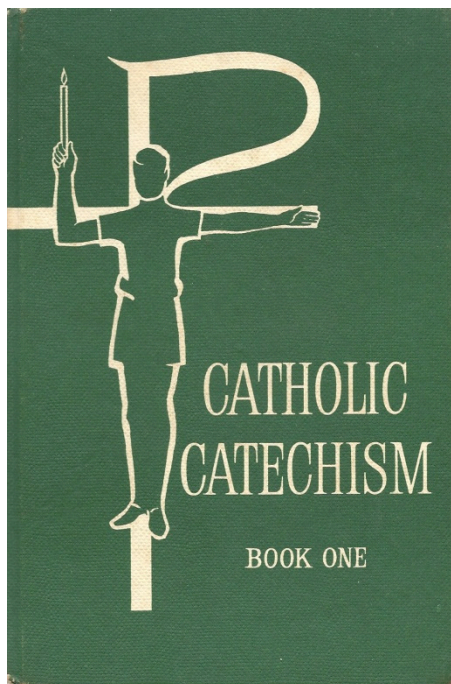
*“He taught them by stories, by illustration and comparisons from their own lives, by what He did. He gave them the experience of the truth. He was teaching, the living experience. The Catholic teacher should, in his prayerful reading of the Gospels, ponder on how Christ taught, listen to Him, watch Him, see His methods.”*

<sup>13</sup> *Torres News*, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1962

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1961

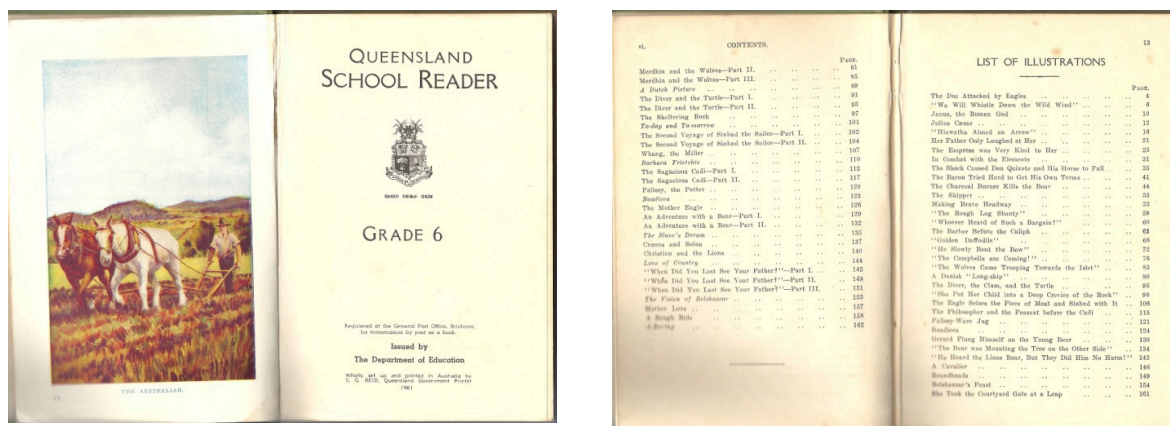
<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, October 23<sup>rd</sup>.





## School Readers still in use

The facsimile is from a 1961 edition. Most probably the indigenous students would have taken an interest in the story of the diver and the turtle. But the bulk of the stories are still of matters that were quite foreign to their experience.



## Some highlights of 1963

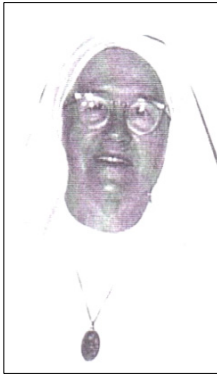
Sister Marie Pierre went from T.I. to Hammond Island and Sister M. Francille began at the school on T.I., with Sister Annunciata continuing classes in music and commercial studies.<sup>16</sup>

There would have been much interested discussion in the whole school community of Sisters, parents and children when it was announced that a State Secondary School was to be established on Thursday Island. The following announcement was made in the Torres News of June 18<sup>th</sup>:

*"Mr. H. A. Adair, M.L.A. for Cook has been advised by the acting Minister for Education and Migration that approval has been given for the establishment of a secondary department at the Thursday Island State school as from the beginning of the school year, 1964. ... Academic, industrial, commercial and home science courses will be provided for sub-junior students in that year, and instructions under the new secondary scheme will be provided for Grade VIII students."*

<sup>16</sup> Torres News, Jan 29<sup>th</sup> and February 5<sup>th</sup>.

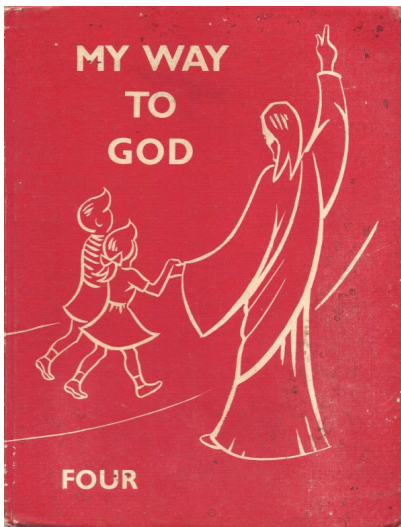
The Sisters' Provincial, Mother Gemma, visited the school and the Sisters' community in July and OLSH school won the Inter-school Sports in that month also.



But big news in September was that Mother Annunciata was to leave after five years with the school. A “Grand Concert and Garden Party” was organized to thank Mother for her time at the school. She was specially thanked, amongst other things, for her great cooperation with the two other schools – Waiben and T.I. State School. There was a special tribute from the Anglican community, and pupil, Dianne Scanlan, presented Mother with an illustrated address expressing the children’s regret at her leaving, thanking her for everything she had done and well-wishing for the future. “*We hasten to assure you, “ she said, “of our love and loyalty to you and wish you to know wherever it may be chosen for you to carry on your noble work, you will carry with you at all times the blessings and prayers of your very devoted pupils of the Convent at Thursday Island.*”<sup>17</sup> The Grand Concert was given an international character with many items representing a considerable number of nationalities.

An innovation associated with the Fete in October, 1963 was that it began with a “Round the Island Race”!<sup>18</sup> Setting out below the school in Douglas Street in front of the school the runners would head through the shopping centre, turn left into Hastings Street then head over the hill to the Waste Station and past the Power Station, through Tamboy village, past Bach Beach and the Hospital and home. There was a cycle race around the island as well.<sup>19</sup>

As Christmas approached there was a “Crib Making” competition, organized by Sister Mary Claver, and the results were published in the *Torres News* of December 3<sup>rd</sup>. There were prizes for every class but some individual students were specially signaled out for originality. They were: Grade 2, Cathie Titasey; Grade 3, Chris Cahill and Caroline Parkhouse; Grade 6, Denis Fahey; Grade 7, Maudesto Mayor.



## My Way to God, 1964

In a similar manner to the “New Catechism” of 1962 is the “My Way to God” series. Many pupils from Sacred Heart school would recognise this cover and the illustrations. Almost every page had a coloured picture to help illustrate the messages being taught. Class sets were still held in the presbytery in 2011, and the printing history of one of those books told of its history: “*First published September 1964*” and “*Reprinted, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1973*”

## Further reflections on readers

*“My own education occurred on Thursday Island from the early sixties to the early seventies. This was well before any “special” programs became available. We had the straight Queensland curriculum, taught by white teachers who had no special preparation, who probably didn’t know we existed until they found out they had a transfer to the region. There was no recognition that English wasn’t our language. I think in those days Torres Strait Creole, our local language, was not considered to be a language. It was broken, bad English. I learned to read on Dick and Dora ... I started off at the same Convent my mother went to which is still there today [1993]. My father took us out of there when I was in Year*

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Sept 24th

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, October 22<sup>nd</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> As told to Br. Barry by Peter Calahora in February, 2012.

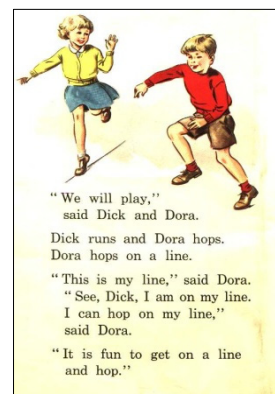
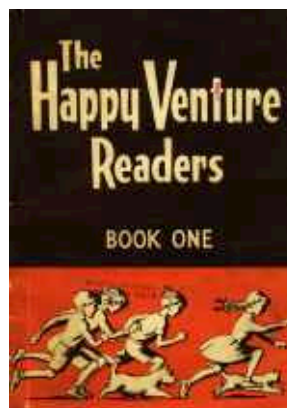


## Children of Mary

Blue cloaks were a feature of the Children of Mary through a particular period of Catholic history in the twentieth century. In May, 1962 there is mention<sup>21</sup> of a number of Children of Mary being “received.”

## Hammond Island children come over each day

In 1964 the Hammond Island school was closed and the children came over by barge to attend Sacred Heart School.<sup>22</sup> More about the ending of the school on Hammond Island is found in another chapter.



## Images and memories from the early 1960s



(Back row: William Barlow, Michael Bin-Juda, \_\_\_\_\_, Henry Lewin, Jeffrey Peddell, \_\_\_\_\_, Peter Moloney, \_\_\_\_\_, Peter Calahora, Augustine Titasey, Thomas Mayor.

4<sup>th</sup> row: Robyn Clark, Patricia Lo foo, \_\_\_\_\_, Helena Pecos, \_\_\_\_\_, Nancy Andersa, Marie Nakata, Joan Ward, Francis Ahmat, Pamela Bowie.

3<sup>rd</sup> row: \_\_\_\_\_ Seden, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ Seden, George Christian, Lillian Barlow, Jack Stephen, Thomas Nakata, Barry Filewood, Christina Pecos, \_\_\_\_\_, Sharon Ah Mat, Paul Calahora, Pauline Seden.

2<sup>nd</sup> row: Mary Laifoo, Clara Bowie, Chee Chee Fujii, Kathy Anderson, Paul Drummond, \_\_\_\_\_, Fabian Mayor, Genevieve Lewin.

Front row: \_\_\_\_\_, Geoffrey Congrieve, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, Glen David, Michael Killoran, \_\_\_\_\_ Savage, Michael Moloney, Tony Dyson. Sister is Sister Claver)

<sup>21</sup> *Torres News*, June 5th

<sup>22</sup> *125<sup>th</sup> Jubilee*, p.35.



(The Sister with the children in the black & white photo is Sister Anna)

The above two photos are believed to be dated 1960 or 1961 or 1962.

The Sports Programme of 1963 on the next page will give delight to any mentioned, their children, their grandchildren and those that know of them or their families.

### Inspectors' Reports of the 1960s

There were 91 students on the roll in 1961<sup>23</sup>. It's wonderful to note that as we enter the 1960s the tone of the school, so often remarked on favourably, continues to earn praise:

*"The pupils, belonging to several Pacific Island races, were friendly and courteous. They form a happy band who play and work in harmony one with the other."<sup>24</sup> They showed fair diligence and concentration during the tests and their response to questioning was good. They obey the word of command promptly and there are no problems of control to be found in the school. The Mother Superior and the two Sisters combine well and form a good working team. Each exerts a strong influence over the pupils and by their example, are fostering good habits both inside and out of the School which should fit the children for future citizenship. The Sisters control the pupils firmly and demand ready and courteous behaviour in their School and they secure good discipline along kindly lines which earns for them the*

ANNUAL SPORTS 1963		CONVENT SCHOOL
EVENT 1. JUNIOR BROAD JUMP		
Michael Mara, Thomas Nakata, Jimmy Filewood. Reserve: Philip Mills		
EVENT 2. INTERMEDIATE BROAD JUMP		
Peter Sabatino, Bora Juda, Henry Lewin. Reserve: Richard Ah Mat.		
EVENT 3. SENIOR HIGH JUMP		
Philip Bowie, Michael Sabatino, Michael Ah Mat. Reserve: Stanislaus Sabatino.		
EVENT 4. OPEN HIGH JUMP		
Arnold Seden, Joseph David, Floyd Mairu.		
EVENT 5. GIRLS 1957 and Under.		
1st. Heat: Dahlia Seden, Marilyn Tanzer.		
2nd. Heat: Janice Fahey, Josephine Sabatino.		
6. GIRLS 1966		
1st. Heat: Colleen Fahey, Denise Filewood, Christine Clark.		
2nd. Heat: Anne Sabatino, Rosla Lewin, Catherine Titasey.		
3rd. Heat: Audrey Anderson, Yvonne Malone x, Ann-Marie Tanzer x.		
7. GIRLS 1965		
1st. Heat: Rosaline Sabatino, Clara Bowie, Veronica Sabatino.		
2nd. Heat: Annette Seden, Rosaline Fujii, Sharon Ah Mat.		
3rd. Heat: Mary Laifoo, Shirley Mills x.		
8. GIRLS 1964		
1st. Heat: Laura Ketchell, Lorraine Seden, Barbara Amber.		
2nd. Heat: Robyn Clark, Lilian Barlow, Catherine Sabatino.		
3rd. Heat: Daisy Lui, Catherine Anderson, Lynne McKenna.		
Genevieve Lewin x, Caroline Fairhouse x.		
9. 2nd		
GIRLS 1963		
1st. Heat: Laura Sabatino, Pamela Bowie, Maureen Ah Wang.		
2nd. Heat: Frances Ah Mat, Mary Sabatino, Dianne Scanlan.		
3rd. Heat: Patricia Laifoo x, Gail Lewin x.		
10. GIRLS 1962		
1st. Heat: Pauline Seden, Nancy Anderson, Jennifer Ah Wang.		
2nd. Heat: Philomena David, Marie Nakata.		
11. GIRLS 1961		
1st. Heat: Martha Titasey, Sylvia Drummond, Francesca Seden.		
2nd. Heat: Margaret Dorante, Joan Ward, Josephine Bowie.		
3rd. Heat: Agnes Sabatino, Louisa David, Lynette Clark.		
Rita Bowie x, Georgina Anderson x.		
12. GIRLS 1960		
1st. Heat: Patricia Sabatino, Maudesta Mayor, Relo Bin Juda.		
2nd. Heat: Anne Filewood, Norsema Ah Boo.		
13. GIRLS 1959		
1st. Heat: Willie Titasey, Michaeline Dorante, Georgina Ah Wang.		
2nd. Heat: Annie Juda, Elaine Ah Mat.		

<sup>23</sup> Inspector H.G. McCarthy, 14<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1961.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Calahorra confirms this. He described the children at the school as "one big group" where the children were "all friends." Indeed he only remembers feeling any racism when he went to the mainland for secondary school. He recalls everyone, from all races, going to each other's houses for parties etc. (Conversation with Br. Barry, February, 2012.)



*respect of the children. The bigger boys are quiet lads whose good behaviour is an example to the younger children."*

While three Sisters are mentioned there appear to be only two teaching. One takes Grades V to VIII with 39 pupils and the other takes all the younger children, 52 in all, in a separate room/building. Inspector McCarthy is worried that this is too great a burden on the two Sisters. He notes that this burden of numbers is exacerbated by the *"the various races and different temperaments to be found in the School."* He notes, too, that the younger classes are overcrowded in the room they occupy, but notes that a "new School is in the course of erection and will be opened soon."<sup>25</sup> The Inspector notes a certain laziness is a number of the pupils, adding to the difficulties of their teachers: *"There is very little incentive to work [coming to school from outlying areas], for many of the children and so they are not ambitious and are content to drift along from day to day."*

Clear enunciation of speech is stressed but the interesting observation is made that the Convent children are not as shy as others the inspector had visited. He notes that, *"Very little is known of Parsing or Analysis"*.<sup>26</sup> To encourage greater effort the Inspector suggests the nurturing of a competitive spirit in study may encourage pupils, *"to vie with each other in producing improved work."*

Writing, both Script and Cursive was said to be being developed. *"The shape of the letters was Very Fair and the slope correct."* Peter Callahora recalls that correct handwriting was strictly supervised and demanded. Sister would walk up and down watching how the letters and words were being formed, and poor work had to be repeated.

In 1962 Inspector McCarthy re-visited the school.<sup>27</sup> He was pleased to see that the two storey "new" school had been completed and that it had been painted in pastel shades and was cool, thanks to its position and the ventilation supplied. He added, *"The school fulfils a long-felt need and is an asset to the town."* It is obvious that he is referring to the refurbishment of the former "Orphanage".



His commendation of the Sisters and the tone they had established is repeated. He notes that, *"Over 85% of the pupils are coloured and belong to several Island races."* He notes in his General Remarks that, *"The school uses a Piano, Projector, Sewing Machine and Typewriter. A new Radiogram and public Address System has been installed."*

In 1963<sup>28</sup> Inspector McCarthy draws attention to the fact that the Sisters are overworked. He notes that seven Grades are being taken by two teaching Sisters, four by one and three by the other. *"The responsibility for the children's education is very heavy on both Teachers. Of the total enrolment, only 25% are white and three or four Grades of coloured pupils is a very heavy burden."* Though he notes in another place that the two Sisters, *"are experienced Teachers and have worked among native and coloured children for many years."* He notes more than once that in spite of spirited teaching and patient preparation, *"the results are frequently disappointing."* He partly blames this on the teaching load being so heavy and suggests, *"another teacher would alleviate the present burdensome load and should make for better all-round standards of efficiency."* A deficiency noted earlier, and mentioned more generally in education in the Torres Strait, appears to be being addressed in the use of illustrated matter, *"to have a closer approach to the native temperament."*

Regarding improvement in speech Inspector McCarthy notes again a lack of motivation in some:

<sup>25</sup> This is the old "Orphanage".

<sup>26</sup> The reader may be wondering exactly what this is!

<sup>27</sup> Inspection 27th and 30th July, 1962.

<sup>28</sup> Inspection on 1st and 2nd August, 1963.

*“Some of them appear to be under the impression that their efforts are futile since the prospects of later advancement are remote.”*<sup>29</sup> And associated with this he adds, *“The Teachers will persist with their present patient and incisive Teaching but perhaps one of the most desirable features is the cultivation among the pupils of some ambition and desire for knowledge.”* A most difficult task!

There is the first mention, in 1963 of classes using the school radio broadcasts for Nature Study, particularly *“Lessons on Australian Plants, Birds and Animals.”* And he notices that not only does the Convent participate in inter-school Annual Athletic Sports, but that in 1963 they won a Trophy!

In 1964 the Inspector was Mr. H.J. Bennett,<sup>30</sup> and his remarks varied little from previous reports. District Inspector T. L. McNamara presented four neatly hand-written pages telling of his findings after visiting the school. His is the first mention in the history of the school of a “lay teacher” and also a “monitress who also supervises the transport of certain young children to a nearby island.”

This appears to be the first mention in the 76 year history of the school to this point, of a lay teacher. The coming of the lay teachers and the beginning of lay leadership is presented in another chapter.

The lay teacher is taking Grades III and IV. While, *“The monitress renders valuable aid especially with Grade I as she understands the young native pupils who sometimes find difficulty with both number and language.”* ... *“The lay teacher is industrious and sincere, her methods being orthodox and sound.”*



There is mention of staff attending a seminar<sup>31</sup> on the “New Mathematics” which is being progressively introduced. There is mention, too, of “incentives” to stimulate the children to greater effort in most subjects. Associated with the new mathematics is mention of the use of the Cuisenaire rods which is believed will be of great use with the coloured pupils, *“once the Staff has had some experience in the use of this method.”*<sup>32</sup>

There appears to be the first mention of grading the children within a particular Grade by ability: *“Grades I, II. Each grade is divided into two groups, the top group being comprised of the brighter children.”*

Special compliments include: *“Some pupils recited quite creditably and drama was surprisingly good.”* And, *“The Art work of some of the coloured boys was outstanding.”*

*“For certain subjects a Sister normally engaged in the teaching of music, takes Grade V in a verandah classroom.”*

Readers who reflect on the European and British nature of much of Australian education at the time will be interested in the comment:

*“The Project Method is widely used in Social Studies, one class having completed a Project on the British Isles. More stress could be laid on the people and products of nearby countries.”*

There is a specially dedicated area, a “side room”, set aside for fretwork and woodwork with special benches provided. And while previously it was noted that the school possessed a sewing machine and a typewriter, each of these is mentioned in 1966 in the plural.

The fretwork facility was put to good work by the boys preparing various articles for sale at the Fete.<sup>33</sup>

While the children possibly did not know the significance of a particular visitor, a Minister of the Crown, who might visit the school from time to time, the visits were much appreciated as it appears to have been the custom for the Minister to leave a large tin of boiled lollies for the children!<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> This remains a problem in the education of indigenous children in remote corners of the Australian mainland 50 years later. Prospects generally for all students of the Torres Strait in 2011, the time of writing, do not appear to have the same bleak outlook.

<sup>30</sup> Inspection 14<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> July, 1964.

<sup>31</sup> This appears to be the first reference to staff attending a seminar.

<sup>32</sup> Cuisenaire rods, as can be seen by the illustration, consist of various lengths of coloured rods. Each colour/length represents a numerical value.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Callahora’s recollections.

<sup>34</sup> Further Peter Callahora memories.



## Goulburn Strike of 1962 and State Aid

Far away in the country town of Goulburn in New South Wales occurred a most unusual but influential event in July, 1962. It became known in Australian history as the “Goulburn Strike”. Its consequences fairly quickly reached Thursday Island and its effects continued for the rest of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

The story is well recalled in an article<sup>35</sup> by Justine Ferrari in *The Australian Newspaper* of April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011, and will be of fascinating instruction to readers unfamiliar with the story:

***“In July 1962, Catholic schools in Goulburn in southwestern NSW closed their doors, leaving about 2000 students out in the cold.***

*Government health inspectors had told the staff at Our Lady of Mercy Preparatory School to replace the toilets.*

*Instead, the Auxiliary Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, John Cullinane, decided to close the school, telling the government to build the toilets; he did not have the money. The parishioners decided it was unfair that parents of one school bear the burden and voted to close all the schools in the parish. Of the 2000 students affected, about 640 enrolled in local government schools but most were left with nowhere to go.*

*The Goulburn school strike lasted barely a week, but its consequences in the debate about school funding resonate to this day. It was a stark illustration of the load carried by non-government schools, particularly the Catholic schools, which received no government funding.*

*Yet, as the strike proved once and for all, without the Catholic schools, the government school system could not cope.*

*The strike was one of the key factors in ensuring private schools received their first chunk of government funding in a century, when the Menzies government embarked on its program building science laboratories in high schools. By 1970, the federal government was providing a flat rate of \$35 for each primary student and \$50 for each secondary student to non-government schools.”*



## Some highlights of 1964 and 1965

Mother Damien becomes the new Principal of the school in 1964 and Sister M. Cornelia joins the staff and community. In February an advertisement is posted in the *Torres News*: “

*NOTICE Vacancies Are available for Music Pupils at OLSH Convent. Phone 66 or call on Rev. Mother Damien at the Convent.”*

In September, 1964, Sister M. Mark returned to visit T.I. after an absence of 32 years!<sup>36</sup>

At the start of 1965 Sister Theresa Mary replaced Sister M. Anna. Robyn Clark’s Report Card for 1965 will give an idea of the form Reports took in those days.

The accompanying illustration appeared in the *Torres News* of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1965, and was headed “O.L.S.H. CONVENT SCHOOL GIRLS’ UNIFORM”. The list for boys’ uniform stated: “Blue shirt, grey trousers, sandals – brown, sockettes –fawn.”



CONVENT SCHOOL THURSDAY ISLAND	
TERM ENDING	2 <sup>nd</sup> December 1965.
NAME	Robyn Clark.
CLASS	V1
POSITION IN CLASS	2 <sup>nd</sup>
PUPILS IN CLASS	8
RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE	82
READING	100
WRITING	78
SPELLING	80
DICTATION	90
ENGLISH	85
COMPOSITION	95
MENTAL ARITHMETIC	95
WRITTEN ARITHMETIC	100
SOCIAL STUDIES	100
TOTALS	905 90%
CONDUCT	Good
ATTENDANCE	Very good
REMARKS	Robyn has done well. she will be promoted to seventh grade.
	A. M. Kilian.

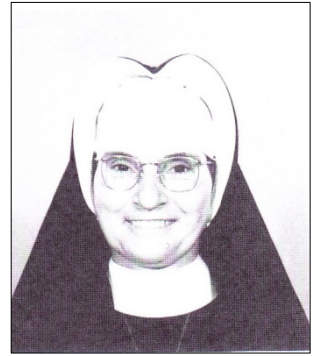
<sup>35</sup> “Children of the Whitlam education revolution”

<sup>36</sup> *Torres News*, February 18<sup>th</sup>.

The Children of Mary were received in the usual way in June and First Communion was made in November. Cake stalls, a cake competition, a Jumble Sale, a Melbourne Cup Afternoon Tea and a P&F Dance were all held during the year as well as a Fancy Dress and Hat Parade as part of the end-of-school Break-up.



Sister M. Claver was given a Farewell in December, thanking her for nine years of service to the children and their families.<sup>37</sup> Sister Jules later recalled some of the physical arrangements of the convent and school in her days on T.I. Some are reproduced in facsimile here from a long letter Sister wrote in 1984.<sup>38</sup> The reader will be rewarded with many insights into various matters of that earlier time.



(Photo is of Sister Claver)



(Photo: Grotto beside T.I. Church with statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, 2012. It is at this grotto and statue that the “Crowning of Our Lady” has taken place in late May in recent times.)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., December 7<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Sister Jules was invited back in 1984 for the centenary celebrations of the Sacred Heart Mission. She wrote an 8 page letter back to her Sisters telling of the celebrations and changes. The letter is held in the archives of the Sisters in Kensington, N.S.W.



(6)

for drinking. When the water was laid on all tanks were removed (old galvanised iron ones). However, the people now realize they should have at least one tank for each home. They now make them out of fibreglass. The main roads of the island, including one right around the island and other side streets adjoining main ones are bitumen. Some of the old shops are still standing with a new look and still in use. The Post Office seems to have a new look also. The picture theatre had its last show a week ago. I didn't inquire if another will take its place. Gwen Maloney was pleased it was closed before the fete was held. There are many cars on the island - I suppose a hundred or more and there are also light trucks and utilities. A small bus runs frequently, every ten minutes or so, right around the Island, I think. Very often I saw it stopping outside the Church - evidently a 'bus stop'. There is also a long bus like our Gov. ones with "Island Tours" written on the side. A lovely, quite large car park has been made at the entrance to the wharf. The children, too, are catered for with a large bicycle shop. Many girls and boys, even primary school children, ride a bike to school. There has been a High School on the Island for some time. Now they are building a larger one at the back of the island. It should be ready for 1985. I'm not sure how 'high' it goes. I think to our Year 10. Quite a number of boys go to S. Augustine's at Cairns - Marist Bros. The girls go to the Sisters of Mercy at Herberton. There are 143 pupils in the Sisters T.I. school. About fifty children come over from and return to Hammond Island by barge each day. One Sister teaches music all day and three Sisters and four lay-teachers are in the school which is built up on the Orphanage site and has lovely verandahs on three sides. The fourth side facing the Convent has steps going up to the Office. The school is up on high piles. The old 'rosy' mangoe tree between the orphanage and the convent had to go, to make room for a new kitchen-dining room, plus laundry, shower and toilet. There is also a toilet on the end of the convent verandah. All were very necessary. In the old kitchen's place is a rotary clothes-line. The old tin bathroom is now a store-place for many and varied things from rubbish bins to garden tools and empty cartons, etc. To the right of the path going up to the school is a small house for the girl who works at the Convent (does washing-up a.m. and tidying-up, washing and ironing). Up near the Bell is the Teachers' House. I'm not sure how many teachers live there. At least one man is on the staff. A very generous lady parishioner, who has a beautiful shop (two big plate-glass windows, sells practically everything) presented Father Mullins with \$100,000 to renovate the buildings - the Sisters' Convent first. It was just about the time when a 'Work Force' - thirty to forty men from Cairns were coming up to do up the Buildings for Father in preparation for the Centenary. Several men commenced on the Convent. The Sisters had to take every single thing out of the Convent. Sister told me "every needle and pin"! The men worked everywhere at once. They put on a new roof; replaced the push-up windows with louvres; made the dormitory on the Quetta side into three lovely rooms; put a door from each parlour - at the ends of the front verandah - into the adjoining room. Before, the parlours used to have only an entrance from the front verandah. They wired round the verandahs with special protection wire and put an up-to-date door on the front verandah and gates with padlocks on the back verandah. The men took four days to convert the Convent

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into a very much-needed home. Every room has an over-head fan, and one or two windows, depending on the position of the room. New curtains were given for the windows and doorways that needed them. Having the fete at the Centenary time necessitated many rooms being crowded with boxes of goods. To accommodate the many visitors some rooms had two beds. There are five Sisters in Community and there were about seven R.S.M. Sisters up for the Centenary days as well as the three of us.

In the Church, the front tower was replaced by a fibreglass one in every respect exactly the same as the old one which had to be demolished. The seats were varnished, and after much thought as to what would be best to do with the windows, the paintings on them, done by Sr. M. Francoise years ago after the War III, were cleaned off to leave the glass clear. The choir loft was completely cleaned and left vacant. A new green carpet (thin) was got for the centre aisle. The Statues, far bigger than life-size, were repainted by an artist (Hungarian) who was very ill at the time of doing them. He persevered, however, till he had finished all three. I had painted them twenty-four years ago for Father McDermott. Now all are very beautiful. The gold-leaf on them cost \$700.

The priests' Presbytery has also a new look outside, and some people told me the inside is at last as it should be - comfortable and suitable for the priests' home. The old school is now an up-to-date hall and many functions are held in it. The little Infants' School - Sr. M. Urban's - formerly in front of the Presbytery is no longer there, so the playground takes in the land. The big bell, which we used to call 'Bishop Verius' bell', has a pulley on it now and Father rings it. It really sounds the same, but not so loud as without the pulley. However, it is not 'Protestant' as dear old Miss Lucy Simpson used to call it when Father put the rope on to the tongue of it.

Sisters, I think I have covered everything. If I have missed anything you would like to know about, just let me know and I'll try and oblige. I hope you have been able to see in your mind's eye, some of the many changes that we were able to see visibly, and so appreciate all that the wonderful men from Cairns did for the Sacred Heart Mission - Church, Convent, School and surroundings. Father T.J. Mullings is the present Parish Priest. He loves T. I. and Hammond Island and all the people love him. Please pray sometimes for Father and his wonderful parishioners.

At Hammond Island the buildings are not used, - the Convent and School. They are a sad sight. Now that all the Mission buildings on T.I. and the houses of the people on Hammond Island have been done up, they will probably have time and money to repair the Mission buildings on Hammond Is.

Some of you may <sup>know</sup> the Sisters of Mercy, so I will name those who were there for the Centenary. Sr. Rita O'Malley (Sup. Gen. Cairns) Sr. Mary Ormond (Joan) Cousin of Fr. Ormond, M.C. Sr. Margaret Rush; Sr. Ann.

T.I. Community: Sr. Rovena (Sup.), Sr. Oliver, Sr. Paul, Sr. Patricia, Sr. Cheryl.

These Sisters were just marvellous to us. They were delighted that Sisters of the olden days of the Mission had come back for the Celebrations. I felt completely at home with each one. They all were ready to listen, to help, or whatever, - whenever and for whatever we approached them.

The Clergy attending the Centenary, and on the three main days concelebrating Mass



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all together were: Bishop Torpy (Cairns); Bishop O'Loughlin (Darwin); Mons. Walsh; Fr. Deere; (Weipa) Fr. Hilary Flynn ; (Dimbula, Cairns) Fr. McSweeney (Cairns, P.P. before Fr. Mullins) Fr. Gallway (Sydney?) Fr. McMahon; (Kens.) Fr. Stenhouse: (Randwick) Fr. Paul Power; (Kens.) Fr. Mullins; (P.P. T.I.) Brother John; (Principal St. Augustine's C. The A.D. SISTERS: Sr. Mary Garnier; Sr. Gertrude Masse; Sr. Solonge (Sup.) from "Star of the Sea" Home. Sr. Barbara (Sup. Gen.) Sr. Laura Dorante; Sr. Dorol Sr. Josepha; Sr. Marie Bigiman (P.N.G.)

Some of the families I knew and met: Clarks; Mrs Etta 84 yrs. just over two big operations Gwen & Joe Maloney; Johnno Clark (Bernard's son) Robyn See Kee (daughter of Johnno.)

Dorante: Francis; daughter, Geraldine; Garniers; McGrath: Danny; Wallace; See Kee Sebasio; Ah Mat: Peter. Asange: Billy, Josie; Takai; Mills: about a dozen! Filewo Drummonds: all the girls. Mrs. Drummond died just before we arrived. Matron McLaren, now retired; Flora Dubbins; Sadie Ah Mat; Marcella Kanak (died this year. R.I.P.)

All the visitors I didn't know were all very friendly. One lady had been (is still) on Weipa 17 years and had never been to T.I. before. She and her husband had reared their family there - 3 daughters and 2 sons -. They were lovely people. We met one of their daughters at Weipa. The population of Weipa is between 2500 and 3000. Others I met were the Dillons, Malones, Mrs. Patching, etc. etc. They had been at T.I. when I wasn't there, but you may know them.

A very big "God bless you" to each Sister. I am sorry all old T.I.ites did not have the wonderful joy and marvellous experience that I had in being present for the beautiful days of the Centenary Celebrations.

Sisters, I meant to write the following after writing about the T.I. Community of Sisters of Mercy. Their own happiness in their work and with each other, and their care and concern for all the visitors were very conspicuous. They were certainly living up to their Mercy Charism - love in action. God bless and reward them!

Father Mullins, the Parish Priest was also, for me, a shining example of a Priest after Christ's own Heart. His kindness, his patience and calmness when he was being called upon by this one and that one, were outstanding. No wonder he is so well loved on the Island!

Lovingly united in prayer to the Heart of Jesus,

*Sh. M. Jones* F.D.N.S.C.

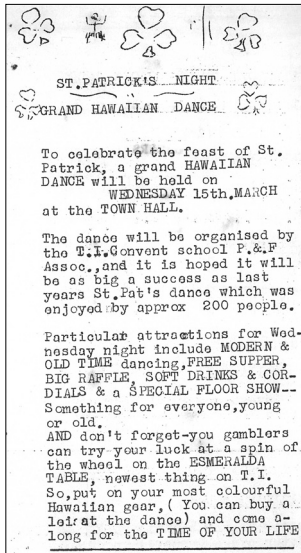
P.S. Sisters, now that I have finished I see I didn't tell you that the Convent had all rooms lined and ceiled, floors carpeted and the building painted inside.

Also, there is a church "St. Stephen's" on the west coast of Cape York. Father goes there for Mass every two weeks. There are less than 50 Catholics and about 25 or 26 attend the Mass regularly.

Quote from the Centenary Booklet: "but from that small congregation there is a wonderful participation and a volume and harmony and zeal in the singing that would rarely be surpassed." Reg. Sebasio plays a mandolin for accompaniment.

## P & F Association, 1967

Probably unaware of what a difficult year lay ahead, the Parents and Friends Association held its meeting, re-electing Mr. John Gardner as President and Mr. Greensill as Secretary, with Mr. Bernard Clark as Vice-President. It was decided to hold two dances during February and if they were successful, then more might be arranged. A St. Patrick's day *Hawaiian Night* was also planned.<sup>39</sup>



And a little flavour of one of the dances in aid of the Sisters and the School might be gained by the advertisement in the *Torres News*<sup>40</sup>:

*"DANCE! DANCE! ROCK 'N' ROLL! A great nite to be had. Join the fun. Dance to "Little Richard and his Y-bens". This FRIDAY nite 17<sup>th</sup>. St the Town Hall. Starts 8 p.m. Soft drinks, Batchelors Supper, raffle, Lucky door prize, Hoop-la, Cigarettes etc. Novelty dances with prizes to be won. GIRLS watch out for the Navy invasion. Proceeds to the Sisters and Convent School. Organised by the Parents & Friends."*

## 1965-1966 Ending of the school on Hammond Island

Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, gained an influx of pupils from Hammond Island when it became impossible for the Sisters to maintain a presence in the school there. In a letter from the Sacred Heart Mission to the Director, Department of Native Affairs, dated 1-7-66<sup>41</sup>, we read:

*"The year 1965-1966 has seen the induction into the Thursday Island schools of fifty Hammond Island school children. With the withdrawal of the nuns previously, and*

*Father Docherty's departure on sick leave, the Hammond School could not continue. Our societies [the order of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart] are so heavily committed everywhere, that neither priests nor nuns could be replaced. An extra nun was promised for Thursday Island, but this became a forlorn hope, and we have been fortunate in being able to employ two paid teachers, Mrs Valentine and Miss Dorante."*

Sister Mary Christopher and Sister Christopher Mary arrived last week to join the teaching staff of the O.L.S.H. Convent school on Thursday Island. The Hammond Island school and convent have been closed and the children of the mission are being brought to Thursday Island for schooling.

(The facsimile in the box is an extract from the *Torres News* of January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1966.)

## Recollections of schooldays, 1960s

Robyn SeeKee (Clark, when at school) recalled a number of schoolday memories in 2012<sup>42</sup>. The school in the early 1960s was in the old "orphanage" with the bottom floor housing Grades 1, 2 and 3 while Grades 4, 5, 6 & 7 were upstairs. Slates and slate pencils were the order of the day for the younger children. Later there was ink in a jar and blotting paper to dab on written work. Fifty years later Robyn remembers the alphabet book where the shape of each letter was represented by a word starting with that letter. A is for apple; b is for bat; g is for Grandma's glasses etc. But searching has not turned up that particular Alphabet Book.

"Reports" were entirely handwritten for every child.

School games recalled included "Eeda" (pronunciation) where one person was "in" on one side of a field and everyone else on the other side. At the call, "Eeda" everyone would run to the other end hoping not to be caught. Those caught added to those "in" and another crossing was attempted without getting caught. The one who survived as the last one not being caught, won. Another game was "London". Everyone lined up at one end and the one "in" at the other end faced away. They spelt out L -- O -- N -- D -- O -- N at the start of which everyone ran forward as far as they could and "froze" before the leader turned around at the end of the

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., February 7, 1967.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., February 14, 1967.

<sup>41</sup> Presbytery archives

<sup>42</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry in 2012.



spelling. Whoever was seen to be moving when the leader turned around was ‘Out’. This was repeated and whoever got to the far end without getting out was the winner.

Both the girls and the boys “got the cane” for misconduct. Robyn remembers that the boys would run their hands through the grease in their hair, as this was supposed to reduce the pain; but that, nevertheless, the boys would cry more than the girls! She believed that the discipline of the time taught consequences, and so, “*you tried not to do the wrong thing.*”

The Sisters, probably aware of what was happening, and to avoid the dangers of throwing stones into the branches of the enormous tamarind tree near the Sisters’ Convent, “allowed” boys to climb the giant tree to shake the branches so that those below could collect and eat the tamarinds.

Both boys and girls played marbles and it was common for the girls to be very proficient. Mothers would make marble bags. Sister Claver would keep objects she found, like handkerchiefs, or articles she had confiscated and save them for the Fete. She would get cotton and other boxes from Mrs Racey’s habdashery shop and decorate them attractively, wash and iron the hankies etc., and prepare the boxes for “Pick-a-Box”.



Chi Chi Fujii remembers rounders and “Tiggy” (or chasings) on the level a little higher up from the school building ... where the staff housing is today (2012). And some boys would try to scare their classmates with frogs! Another memory was of Sister Mary Paul’s kindly way of explaining things in a calm, slow voice, in a manner that “*talked you through it*” so that there was understanding.

### 1967, a difficult year

In the Inspection of 1967<sup>43</sup> there is a noted fall-off in school enrolments from the 110 in 1966 to 52 in 1967. Things were not going well with the school. A number of circumstances conspired against success. The Inspector, writing in July, states:

*“Numerous Staff changes in recent months have placed stresses on the organisation of the school. The resignation of a Lay Teacher and the inability to have her replaced resulted in the senior grades being transferred to the State School. Grade IV has its fourth Teacher for the year and Grades I and II have been somewhat similarly placed. In short, the school has gone through a very difficult period.”*

The staff, at the time of the inspection, consisted of the Sister-in-charge, one other Sister (part time), a Lay Teacher and “*a young Teacher-Aide of Torres Strait Island extraction.*”

The Inspector noted with approval that, “*Numerous work cards, stencils and teaching aids have been prepared for individual work in Mathematics and English. Teachers are becoming “au fait” with the new approaches in Science and Maths.*”

Inspector Christiansen concludes his Report with a tribute to the Sisters for their extraordinary zeal, patience and persistence over so very many years since 1887:

*“It is anticipated that a different Teaching Order of Sisters will conduct the school as from the commencement of the 1968 School year. It should be recorded that this will bring to an end a period of very fine service to education in an extremely difficult field by the Sisters of the Order of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.”*

Fridays after lunch for some students conjures up memories of Brasso, rags and church brassware. The traditional spot was the concrete tank at the sacristy door. The photo is taken at this very spot.



<sup>43</sup> Inspector D. Christiansen, 21<sup>st</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1967.

## CHAPTER 23

### The Catholic Church in the 1960s

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Change is difficult for most people to cope with. Familiar things and familiar ways give many people comfort and security. When a regular routine is interrupted there is commonly some stress and anxiety experienced.



And very big changes were overcoming the Catholic Church in the 1960s. First of all there was the election of Pope John XXIII (pictured) in 1958. A warm and friendly person Pope John endeared himself to millions with his natural personal manner. Through him began an “*agornimento*”, an Italian word for opening up. He is said to have opened up the windows of the Church. And then, struck by a singular inspiration, he called an Ecumenical Council of the Church ... the first since 1870. This is a meeting of all the Bishops of the world to consider major issues together.

And this Council, 1962-1965, (see picture of assembly in St. Peter’s Basilica) introduced many changes in the ways of the Catholic Church, and they spread, of course, to the Sacred Heart Mission, Torres Strait and to the Catholic community on T.I.

A very big change was that the liturgy of the Church, particularly the Mass, was to be in the local language of each country or region. So for T.I. it was to be English.

The altar was altered, too. A small table altar was placed in the sanctuary and the priest conducted the Mass from the far side of the altar, facing the people across the altar. Several responses during Mass were said by the people in English.

Altar servers, that had been exclusively boys for centuries, now, in some places, included girls. Some Parish Priests did not allow girls as altar servers, but things were changing. Here and there it was found that the girls were more enthusiastic and reliable than the boys. The Council, also, gave a much greater role in the Church to the laity.

Lay people, too, would occasionally read the Scriptures at Mass.

These changes also made way for much greater participation of women in the affairs of the Church.

At the same time there began a diminution in the number of Nuns and Brothers throughout the world, not excluding Australia. Partly this was because a large number left their Religious Orders and partly it was because far fewer were joining religious life.



All this was to impact on Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School. The major change that would affect the school was the decline in the number of Religious. Besides fewer numbers, some of the Religious Orders found that their sisters and brothers were ageing, and were passed the age for running a school or conducting classes.

The Religious costume of many orders, also, underwent changes. A greater simplicity was introduced and Sisters, particularly, no longer wore starched linen around their faces and often, too, black was changed to white, particularly in warmer climates.

Through the Vatican Council the “People of God” became a common phrase in church parlance, that embraced all in the Church, Bishops, clergy and lay Catholics. The Church was becoming less hierarchical and more clearly inclusive of all.

Lay Catholics were becoming more educated and had ideas of their own and had learned at their Catholic schools how to speak up in class and express their opinions. This carried over, naturally, to matters concerning the Church, liturgy, church finances, the Catholic School etc.

Some parishes organised “Parish Councils” which consisted of parish members who, in some cases, were elected by the parish generally, to advise the Parish Priest. Occasionally an accountant or similar professional would advise on church finances. Budgets were drawn up and auditing of accounts began to take place.



Following trends in popular music, the guitar was occasionally heard accompanying hymns in church, especially by the younger folk.

New Hymn Books were produced. One that became extremely popular in parts of Australia was “*Living Parish Hymnbook*”, first published in 1961 but going into many reprints through the 1960s. Indeed sets could be found for use in many churches fifty years later.

Old hymns such as “Faith of Our Fathers”, “Sweet Sacrament Divine”, “Hail Queen of Heaven”, “Hail Glorious Saint Patrick” and others were less often heard. Many of the “new” hymns were based on the psalms or on passages from Scripture. Indeed the collection of hymns that Father Frank Andersen, M.S.C., produced in the 1970s, “*On Eagles’ Wings*”, has the sub-title, “Scripture in song.”

A feature of young people’s liturgies was the “Folk Mass”, with most of the melodies akin to folk songs of the time, such as “*Kum Ba Yah*”, first recorded by American folk-singer, Pete Seeger in 1957.

Occasionally in a large parish one of the Sunday Masses would be a “Youth Mass” where informality, new hymns, guitars and folk melodies were the order of the day. And it was not unheard of to abandon the formal altar and bring a low table to the gathering where all would sit around. The words of the Mass were unaltered but the surrounds were entirely changed.

Pomp and grandeur associated with the Pope and Bishops became much more muted. Pope John XXIII was the last Pope to wear the elaborate three-tiered gold-encrusted papal crown. And Pope Paul VI required that he be buried in a simple wooden casket rather than in something ornate and elaborate. This was an enormous change from the traditional casket for a pope. Bishops had previously worn a long purple “train” on ceremonial occasions. Such elaborate “dressing up” went into decline.



Priests in Australia for almost the entire time since the first official Catholic Chaplain to the colony of N.S.W., Father J.J. Therry in 1820, had worn a “biretta”. The many boys who trained as altar boys on T.I. would have been handed this hat at the start of Mass and would have handed it back to the priest at the end of Mass. This custom ceased.

Pope Paul VI, 1963-1978, also strongly championed the cause of Social Justice. His encyclical *Progressio Populorum* (1967) was a most strident defence of justice to the poor and the moral obligation of the well-off to share their wealth. This was an echo of the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII who was saying similar things when the school began in the 1880s.



A further development in the Catholic Church that grew at this time was the “Ecumenical Movement”, namely dialogue and cooperation with other Christian churches and groups. A long held belief, that “*outside the Church – meaning the Catholic Church – there is no redemption,*” was down-played and only remembered with embarrassment.



Regulations forbidding Catholics to attend services in Protestant churches were much relaxed, even totally abandoned.

An era that some refer to as a period of self-congratulatory Catholic Triumphalism had come to an end. Perhaps the Church was now – 1960s, 1970s, 1980s -- more like Christ the friend of publicans and sinners, and ready to work humbly amongst them.



Happily for the Catholics on T.I., Hammond and Horn Islands at that time, Providence (and the Bishops) had appointed pastors to T.I. who were in tune with the changes, and were “men of the people”. These were Father Miah McSweeney and later Father Tom Mullins.

(The photos show Father Tom Mullins on the left and Father Miah McSweeney on the right.)







*there for an hour or two. ... then they can fish, swim go to the Quetta Memorial cathedral to hear the natives singing on Sunday night, visit the other Islands and look at the bay some more. ..."*

(The rough date of the photograph can be gained by noticing in the bottom right-hand corner, the newly built High School, 1966.)

Vera Attwater, in an article headed, "A Visitor's Impressions"<sup>3</sup> gets a bit carried away in anticipation of arriving on T.I.:

*"As nature so often intends a surprise, surpassing the thrill of awaiting the raising of the curtain on some great theatre performance, the heavens magically and magnificently unveiled the beauty in rich contrast to the Cape and the mass of Islands and reefs below. ... We circled Thursday Island twice – my camera working overtime and I remember now the thrill of expectancy. My first impression highlighted by the little Island boys in their richly coloured Lava-lavas and I knew then I would not be disappointed."*



Like so many other visitors, Attwater is a bit disappointed on closer inspection of the physical aspects of the island, but feels compensated by other aspects:

*"Thursday Island does not quite compare with a dreamer's imaginative impression of a tropical Isle, but like all good things it grows on one to the extent that reality is favoured to the imaginative, for I first thought this little town to be lacking in the artistry of the paintbrush but once absorbing the warmth, sincerity and friendliness of the townspeople ones personality seemed to harmonise overshadowing the unimportant details. ... The pleasing quaintness of the softly shaded billiard rooms with equally softer music fascinated me for it revealed much in a subtle way. The open air casualness and the friendly smiling Islanders relaxing and enjoying quietly an entertainment for all to see, has no comparison to the harsher strains of music and closed doors which mystifies the players of the south."*<sup>4</sup>

The untidiness noted by others is described, but given a romantic gloss:

*"The foreshores of what could be a nice sandy strip between the wharves are festooned with broken glass – rusted bulwarks buried in the sand and skeletons and hulks of boats that after the first shock of dismay, one's imagination is caught up for they in their derelict state whisper the romance of their earlier days on these vivid blue seas."*

The reader may enjoy reading an account of various matters concerning Thursday Island in the middle of

#### CAPE YORK TO THE KIMBERLEYS

boat coming into port, or drifting out towards Torres Strait, its shining white sails set gracefully against the wooded outline of Friday Island, Honeymoon Island, or Prince of Wales Island.

On the wharf there will be a crowd of spectators: natives and half-castes, with an occasional sun-blackened white, as if industry were only a relative term in a slow-moving world within ten degrees of the equator. The tempo here is of the South Seas, not Australia. You are reminded of Pago Pago or Papeete. The people themselves are reminiscent of Polynesians. They look curiously at the set and earnest faces of new arrivals from Australia, as if puzzled by the impatient, quick-walking men in dark clothes who never seem to laugh or to indulge in careless greetings.

The first impression of Thursday Island is usually a romantic one. Whether it remains so is a matter for individual taste. The pearling industry, despite its ingrained story-book glamour, is not by any means romantic. It has been too frequently associated with violent death for that. Perhaps that in itself accounts for the free and good-natured atmosphere that seems always to prevail on this small island. I always remember my first visit there. I had flown up for the day from Cairns, with the airline manager, just to have a look at what the end of the continent looked like. Having glimpsed it, I could not bring myself to return without even landing on T.I. I had only a few shillings in my pocket and was wearing only shorts and shirt. But within an hour the local airline agent had offered to lend me money, and a hotel-keeper found me a fresh shirt, even though I was staying at a rival pub. That is the kind of place the island is.

Others have characterized it differently. Thirsty Island! Well, so it is, for men are surely entitled to alcohol when they daily risk their lives in a dangerous underwater world. Sink of the Pacific! I fail to see how T.I. has earned that title, at least in the comparative respectability of modern times. In an earlier age that might perhaps have been partly true, but not by any means the whole truth. There

<sup>3</sup> *Torres News*, 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1957

<sup>4</sup> This observation will contrast with one from another observer later, where he regrets that, "Windows had been boarded up, the interior transformed into a replica of an airless city lounge."



the 1950s including apparent class distinctions. There are also explanations of who were “free” men and who, to use the expression of the time, were “Under the Act.” The cutting comes from one of Gwen Moloney’s Scrapbooks. The date and page were not kept. Don’t miss the reference to gossip.

# There Is Little Community Pride In Thursday Island

**T**HURSDAY Island is Australia’s most northerly town. It lies in 10 degrees south latitude, in the midst of the beautiful Prince of Wales archipelago. Hundreds of coral cays lie just to the east. It ought to be Australia’s tropical paradise, but it is hardly that.

It is possibly the dustiest, windiest town under the Commonwealth flag. There is not enough water for domestic purposes. The buildings are mostly half-finished shacks. The cost of living is appalling.

The dust is a fine chalky powder that fills your shoes and trouser cuffs. It swirls in the trade wind, and fills your mouth with grit.

To be fair, it is worse than usual just now because the

charm about it, a swash-buckling impudence that drives visitors from the south to take their punishment and ask for more.

Moreover, there are the islands clustered thickly about, lifting their heads from sapphire seas, floating on dim horizons. There are coconut palms waving over coral beaches.

There are luggers tossing by the dozen in the anchorage, with satiny copper island men swarming over them cleaning pearl shell, or preparing for the next diving voyage. There is color everywhere.

The streets are filled with islanders, with deep lines of ferocity chiselled from nostrils to chin; yet they are not a fierce race, whatever they may once have been.

They smile shyly at strangers, among them-

owners, pearl buyers, office workers, school teachers, and so on.

Not all of them are strictly white. There are many men with skins from brown to gold. Island blood is in their veins—or Chinese, or Indian, or Filipino, or Samoan, or a mixture of one or more of these.

These men merge into the second class—the half-castes or coloreds. Only if their skins are light enough, and if they have sufficient sophistication, can they preserve their footing among the ruling class.

The half-castes are a wonderful mixture. The blood of half the Western Pacific islands, together with Malay, Indian and Chinese, combines to make them a race apart.

Many of them have singular beauty and most

**Dusty, Untidy Town  
Where Living Is  
Difficult And Dear**



Crew of a lugger on deck after a day's work.

**by a special correspondent**

Queensland Government is building roads and grinding the soft creamy stone of the island to a fine powder. But it must always be bad.

The gutters are choked with piles of dry leaves. Dry weeds fill the vacant allotments. The hills beyond the town are covered with arid scrub. There are only a couple of hours a day in which you can have a bath.

Milk comes out of very expensive tins, because during the Dry there is not enough feed for even a few cows. Almost everything consumed in the island, with the exception of fish and a few tropical fruits, must come from the far south, which puts 25 p.c. on its price.

But in spite of all this the town has a ragged, gipsy

self they flash their teeth in hilarious laughter for no reason the onlooker can fathom.

Their women lounge in the sun and gossip. Their children play in the dust or eat sweet biscuits. Their young men collect round the radio or juke box.

Their men, such as are not working the luggers on the far reefs, work on various tasks around the town with an air of casual indifference; or else, if they are “free,” they congregate in bars.

There are three classes on Thursday Island, all of them merging into one another.

First, there are the white men, numbering about 300 out of a total population of 1,800. These are lugger

of them have an attractive air of independence and charm.

Both these classes are “free”—that is to say, the Division of Native Affairs has no jurisdiction over them. They can keep their wages, buy and sell property, drink in bars.

The islanders proper are not free. They are under almost as many disabilities as is a mainland aborigine.

Their earnings are paid to the Division of Native Affairs, which doles them out a percentage. They have to get permission to sign contracts. They cannot move from one place to another without permission.

There is no doubt that such an unsophisticated race needs some form of control, and the evidence

shows that in the Torres Strait group control is benevolent and well intentioned on the whole.

The difficulty is to draw the dividing line between the islanders and the coloreds. To the casual eye, many of the free men lounging in bars could be islanders, which leads to some ill-feeling from those on the wrong side of the fence.

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The shops are dim, confused shacks, each of which seems to sell everything there is to sell for 24 hours of the day to the sound of radio or juke box.

The only thing they will not sell after six o'clock is methylated spirits. The islanders, kept out of the bars, have a taste for it; and the theory is that their tastes will be curbed

if they can only buy it during the daytime.

The wind blows from the south-east for eight months of the year. It is a clean, cool wind, keeping the mean annual temperature of the islands lower than Queensland cities far to the south.

On most of the islands you greet this wind with gratitude, but on Thursday Island it only raises the dust and makes folk irritable with its endless tearing at the nerves.

In the summer comes the north-west monsoon, taying the dust with torrents of rain, and turning the island over-night into a green paradise, though a humid one.

Apart from shell fishing, the main industry of Thursday Island is gossip. Nobody has much private life. The grapevine is much more efficient than the antiquated telephone system.

While preserving the courtesies, the white population make the stranger feel he is being watched wherever he goes. The colored people are franker. They stare at you and continue to stare till you are out of sight.

All the whites are vocal about what is wrong with the island, who is plotting its ruin and for what purpose. On these points, however, there is little agreement among them.

In spite of this, they are a kindly, hospitable people, and sincerely enjoy a drink with their worst enemies.

★

Things might be easier for them and they might have a greater community pride, if the town had been built on almost any other of the islands.

Thursday is one of the barrenest of them, and has about the lowest rainfall. The others have patches of rain-forest jungle, abounding in wild pig and deer, whereas Thursday has thin scrub.

It was chosen for the settlement for the sound reason that it was the only island with a permanent

deep anchorage, though even then it was deep enough only for small ships.

On the other side of the island from the town, only 10 minutes' walk away, is quietness and beauty. There is a long, level, palm-fringed beach, little wind, and no dust.

Over the strait the mountains of Hammond Island rise steeply from the milky blue sea. You can sit among frangipani and hibiscus and watch fish leap in the coral-strewn channel.

This is where Thursday Island buries its dead. Lovely though it is, the living seldom seem to walk there.

*Adelaide "Advertiser" 1955*

*Adelaide "Advertiser" 1955*



## Children's entertainments

**THURSDAY IS.**

THURSDAY ISLAND, October 7.—We are now enjoying very nice weather as the wind has died down although a little on the hot side, but quite a change from the wind.

As the neap has started the luggers are returning from the pearling grounds and the catch has not been up to expectations.

Mr. Jack MacNulty, who was admitted to hospital a few weeks ago passed away on the night of the 4th instant. The funeral, which took place from the Catholic Church, was one of the largest seen for some time and bore the respect of the community. The MacNulty family are amongst the oldest identities on the island and the last surviving member of this well respected family is Miss M. MacNulty, and has the sympathy of the people on the island in the loss of her brother.

The children's fancy dress ball was held last night and, as usual, was the event of the year. The characters are too numerous to mention. The judges were Mrs. Ockendon, Mrs. Moore and Mr. Humboldt, who were passengers from the Elsanna. The grand march was played by Mrs. G. Moloney, after which the judging commenced, and it must have been very difficult for the judges to decide the prize winners. The winners were: Tiny tots: "Hula Girl," Bonnie Drummond 1; "Bunny," Beverley Clark 2; "Powder Puff," Janet Bruce 3. Pairs: "Sailor and Girl," Priscilla Ross and Vic. Joseph 1; Alimat Bin Ahmat and Amit Omar 2. Girls, 5 years: "Pixie Butterfly," Margaret Green 1; "Hula Ballet," Priscilla Loban 2; "Music," Priscilla Ah Mat 3. Girls, 6 years: "Drum Major," Julie Green 1; "Queen of Hearts," Rosaline Mortensen 2; "Hawaiian Girl," Priscilla Rose 3. Boys, 5 and 6 years: "Indian," Peter Adams 1; "Drummer Boy," Herbert Peddell 2; "Pedro," Bill Farmer 3. Girl, 7 to 9 years: "Bo Peep," Margaret O'Leary 1; "Gypsy," Seriba Bingarape 2; "Gainsborough Lady," Jill Duffield 3. Girls 11 and over: "Madame Du Barry," Miss Corrine Young 1; "The Bat," Maureen Laifoo 2; "Queen," Ann Woods 3. Boys, 9 and over: "Pelaco," Humphrey Lindley 1; "Devil," William Arabena 2; "Warrior," John McGuinness 3. Boys 11 and over: "Telegraph Pole," 1; Jimmy Peddell 1; "Robin Hood," Bill Wrexford 2; "Pirate," Elton Thorpe 3. A dainty supper was served at 10 o'clock followed by ice cream. After supper the adults took over the floor until midnight.

**THURSDAY IS.**

THURSDAY ISLAND, July 18: It is pleasing to note further new buildings on the Island. Bowden Pearling Co's. building consisting of store, office, and living quarters above, has now been completed. A house for the Quarantine Department is about completed, and a start has been made on two houses in John Street, one house for Island Industries Board and the other for Bowden Pearling Co. Mr. T. O'Connor is erecting a two-storeyed shop and dwelling in the main street, and Mr. E. Clark has commenced the foundations for a shop also in the main street.

On Friday night, the 14th inst., about 36 children entertained the people with a delightful concert. The Mayor, Ald. J. I. Dunwoodie, echoed the sentiment of the people when he thanked Mrs. A. Mortensen and her daughter, Mrs. G. Thomas, who were responsible for the training of the children. No one item was better than another. From the tiny tot of four years to the lovely teenagers, each gave a performance of a seasoned artist. Mesdames Moloney and Eilewood were accompanistes of the evening. Mrs. J. Cadzow and Messrs. E. and B. Saraneales played the overture. The sum of £61 was raised towards buying chairs for the Town Hall.

In spite of the deprivations in the post-war years, and the wind blowing up the dust, there was still room for entertainments.

The two newspaper extracts headed **THURSDAY IS.** are found in one of Gwen Moloney's Scrapbooks and are placed roughly in the mid 1950s.

One is a Fancy Dress Ball and a large number of children are listed, along with their costumes.

The children would have been pleased to have been served a "dainty supper" at the end of the concert, followed by ice cream, and the adults would also have

been pleased to have "taken over the floor" for dancing till midnight.

The other is a children's "delightful concert". *"From the tiny tot of four years to the lovely teenagers, each gave a performance of a seasoned artist."*

How stringent thing were in those days is realized when the children's concert raised 61 pounds which went towards buying chairs for the Town Hall.

Not often did the Thursday Island cinema play host to the "World Premiere" of a movie.

So this extract from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1954, p.5, deserves recording.

**THURSDAY IS. PREMIERE**

THURSDAY ISLAND, Sunday. — A "capacity house" of 1,000 Thursday Islanders and visitors last night applauded enthusiastically the world premiere of the Chips Rafferty film, "King of the Coral Sea."

The photography is excellent and the dialogue of the film is distinct, although at times it was lost in the cheers and whistles of the audience. Underwater scenes are authentic and dramatic.

Francis Chin Loon, a Thursday Island girl who stars in the film, attended the premiere.

On the stage she was presented with a bouquet of orchids and frangipanni.



To allow the reader to gain a feel for Thursday Island at the start of the 1960s it has been decided to reproduce on the following page two and a half pages from George Farwell's 1962 book, *Cape York to the Kimberleys*.<sup>5</sup>

## EIGHT

## ON THIRSTY ISLAND

THE FIRST SIGHT of Thursday Island is one of astonishing beauty. From the air the ocean is so palely green and clear, the cluster of small islands so sharply defined, the atmosphere so brilliant that the whole scene appears in some way illuminated. After the drabness of the land behind, this sudden flood of colour gives the outspread world a new dimension, transparent and unreal. It is reduced to extreme simplicity: a pastel blue, unclouded sky, wash green sea, and a feathering of white wave-crests under the south-east trades.

Then the aircraft comes in to land on the long, flat surface of Horn Island, and the crowding islands vanish behind olive-green scrub and the boles of gum trees. This surely is the end of the journey; and yet it is not. Thursday Island is still some time away, first in a cumbersome bus that races along dusty roads, then the leisurely wait beside a worm-eaten jetty for the launch that never seems on time, and finally the three-mile crossing of a choppy, windbeaten passage to the pearling port.

Thursday Island without its pearl-fishing is inconceivable. The visitor becomes aware of its single reason for existence long before the launch swings its stern clumsily towards the town wharf, whose piles rise high above the landing-steps. Even at the peak of the season there are always a few luggers at anchor offshore, swinging with each change of tide, bows nosing into the unvarying south-easter. These are attractive little boats, twin-masted, broad of beam, their low decks crowded with diving-gear. Usually an idling group can be seen on deck; sleek, dark-skinned figures in crimson or multicoloured lava-lavas, one of them perhaps fingering a guitar. Most likely there will be at least one

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*years I found a notable difference. Few people promenaded up and down; hardly a sola topi or a suit of white ducks was to be seen; the group of natives who once squatted under the wongai trees were no longer there.*

*"Yet this must formerly have been one of the world's most picturesque waterfronts, with a cosmopolitan a crowd as could be imagined. I recalled drinking in the Blue Room of the Federal, caught up among a vivid group of characters who constantly came and went, men with an extraordinary range of experience, from European capitals to the Coral Sea, from torn sails in some cyclonic storm to artist's canvases and the temple-dancing of Java. While drinking a glass of rum in the front bar of the Federal, it was possible to look out of an unshuttered window at leaning palms and an exquisite expanse of pale water, white-painted luggers, and green islands bronzed in sun.*

*"But the bar, I found, had been discarded. Windows had been boarded up, the interior transformed into a replica of an airless city lounge, with cheaply painted chairs, cheap garish walls, and artificial flowers. The Federal Hotel, once meeting ground for the world's adventurers, had been suburbanised, made vulgar, and its back turned upon the sea."*

Katherine M. Cummins wrote a short piece in July, 1962<sup>7</sup>. After speculating on why more Australians don't visit T.I., she says of T.I.:

## ON THIRSTY ISLAND

were some tough characters among those early pearlers and traders, slave-masters, and self-seeking adventurers; but the nineteenth century was not noted for its gentleness. My only complaint today is that island life has become dulled and *petit bourgeois*. It has lost the vigorous personality it once had. Largely, I suspect, this has been due to the instability of the pearling industry and its economic decline during recent years.

Perhaps pearling can be called permanently unstable; each time I have arrived at T.I., or talked with master-pearlers elsewhere, I have heard the same forebodings. The price of pearlshell, it seems, is always falling. Good divers are always scarce, too demanding, reluctant to work at satisfactory depths. Plastics are always threatening to drive mother-of-pearl out of the button market. Certainly fortunes are no longer being made comparable with those that were made in the late nineteenth century, though I have always noticed the same trading companies open for business, and the same large piles of shell on their sorting floors.

Farwell's, further comments might add to the picture he paints in 1962 of Thursday Island in contrast to his recollections from six years previously. He writes:<sup>6</sup>

*"Perhaps this [the decline in the romance of pearls] partly accounts for the decline in the colourfulness of T.I.'s waterfront, once a lively and crowded curve of roadway fringing the tidal flats where beached luggers still lean precariously on their sides. Even after six*



<sup>5</sup> Farwell, George, *Cape York to the Kimberleys*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1962. Pp.75-7.

<sup>6</sup> P.84-5.

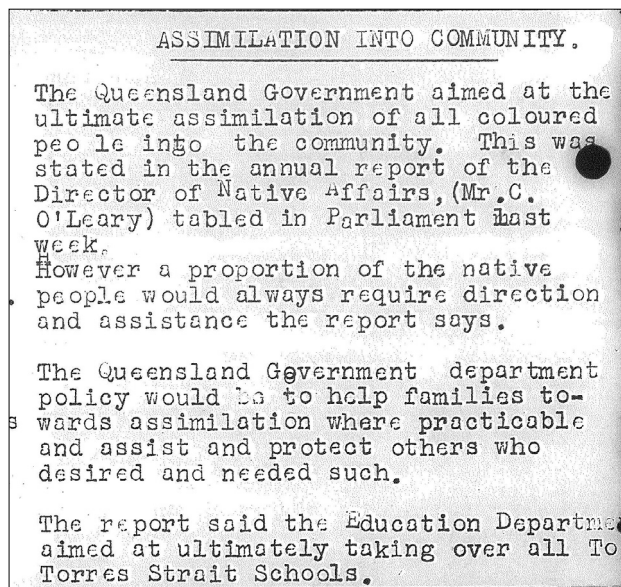
*"It is a jewel of a place. Its opalescent seas, its happy Islanders who greet you cheerfully as you walk along the street, the interest of these islands that are rich in Australian history – these are some of the reasons why it makes a wonderful holiday. ... There is the generous hospitality of all who live here."*

## Assimilation, 1956, 1963, 1964 and 1965

*"In 1956 Cornelius O'Leary, Director of Native Affairs from 1942 to 1963, announced for the first time in Queensland that the government's policy was now one of assimilation, based around 'sound education' and 'suitable housing'. He referred to the pre-1956 policy as 'pre-assimilation' (1956 Annual Report of the Director of Native Affairs pages 3 and 5). Legislation to implement the new policy was finally passed in 1965".<sup>8</sup>*

*"By the early 1960s the economic value of Torres Strait Islanders as workers to be held in the Islands had vanished with the collapse of the marine industry. The adoption of the policy of assimilation coincided with this change and Torres Strait Islanders were freed to leave the Islands and settle on the mainland. "*

The facsimile from the *Torres News* is from the edition of November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1963. The reference to the Education Department taking over all Torres Strait Schools was to be quickly put into effect with the integration of the Waiben School and the T.I. State schools being effected in the following year.



## Building and reconstruction

*"In 1947 ... over 45 buildings were completed – schools and teachers' residences, houses, stores and Medical Aid Posts – as well as other associated repairs and improvements to existing buildings. Vocational training, career counselling and apprenticeship schemes for school-leavers enabled many young Island people to obtain employment in a wide range of activities. By 1964, over 1,000 Island people had moved to communities outside their own islands. And this number has increased steadily over the years. [Written 1977] For such a relatively small number of people, their cultural, social and economic contributions to Australian society in many occupations is significant."<sup>9</sup>*

## Changes in the State schools

The reader would have noticed that since 1913 and the establishment of the "Coloured School", there had been three Primary schools on Thursday Island. That was to change during the 1960s.

*"In education, radical change had occurred shortly before my arrival at TI. In 1964 the two state schools were amalgamated on the site of the old Coloured School, becoming the Thursday Island State School. Its average attendance in 1964 was 395 students, with 96 students in the Secondary Department. In 1966 the old White school on the hill officially became the Thursday Island State High School. It was a high school for all races and a gathering point for all."*

Singe explains, *"Until the 1960s Islanders had not been permitted to enroll at the White School on top of the hill. Rather they attended the Coloured School down in Frog Valley."*<sup>10</sup> He tells of his sense of optimism with the mid 1960s changes in the reorganization of the State schools:<sup>11</sup>

*"[The new State High School] was a high school for all races and a gathering point for young people from all over the Torres Strait. It is not surprising that I sensed such optimism and excitement among my Islander students and their families."*

<sup>7</sup> *Torres News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1962. Article entitled: "A Southern visitor Look Us Over".

<sup>8</sup> Lifted from *"Bringing Them Home"*, from a posting of the Report on the net, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Finch, p.53.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>11</sup> *My Island Home*, pp.8-9.



And at the end-of-year Speech night the special guest, Mr. George Mye, spoke<sup>12</sup> of the success of the High School's first year as, "*a lesson in inter-racial relationships.*"

### Movement towards social integration?

An interesting development in social integration on Thursday Island was remarked on by Fr. Frank Flynn in his book *Northern Frontiers*<sup>13</sup> in relation to the farewell to the Director of Native Affairs, Mr. Cornelius O'Leary, in 1963:

*"The farewell in 1963 was evidence of Mr. O'Leary's popularity among the islands. Chiefs from all the islands attended – in fact the function was an important breakthrough in the way Europeans and islanders got together socially. Most of them were attending their first 'mixed' gathering of this kind."*

(Photo shows Cornelius O'Leary being farewelled by a group of prominent Islander leaders during his "farewell tour" of the islands in 1963. They had requested such gathering to be able to thank him for his period of administration.)



### Foreshadowing end of discrimination regarding drinking

The attached facsimile from the *Torres News* of November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1960, heralds the ending of discrimination against Islanders regarding the drinking of alcohol.

### Ending of romance

If ever a photo might evoke the romance of boats, the smell of rigging, the tingle of adventure, the prospect of finding pearls and pearl-shell, then this coloured photo might serve. It's not from the set of a film but from a Queensland Centenary book telling of the various regions of Queensland and their industries.<sup>14</sup> But the pearling and associated marine industries of T.I. and the Torres Strait were nearing their end.

The amendment of Queensland laws next March to allow any coloured person outside aboriginal missions and settlements on the mainland to obtain alcoholic drinks legally was foreshadowed today by the Minister for Health and Home Affairs, Dr. H. Noble, in Parliament. He said the only coloured person outside missions and aboriginal settlements who had any difficulty in obtaining an alcoholic drink was the full blood. But he obtained it anyway by paying a higher price.



### Vibrancy of musical life

Various ones remark on the musical life of Thursday Island in the 1950s and 1960s. An example is given by Mahendra Mendis<sup>15</sup> in his recollections recorded in *Navigating Boundaries*:

*"In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a vibrant musical scene. People really enjoyed making music in their homes and there were great bands that played at dances and at parties in people's backyards. ... That was when Seaman Dan, George Dewis, Jerry Lewin and Billy Shibasaki*

<sup>12</sup> *Torres News*, Dec 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> P.184-5.

<sup>14</sup> Lack, C. (Ed.) *Queensland, Daughter of the Sun*, Jacaranda, Brisbane, 1959, p.142.

<sup>15</sup> Shnukal, Anna et al., Editors, *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*, Pandanus Books, A.N.U., 2004, P.295.



*had a band. I remember Karim was a great guitarist. The music changed in the 1960s, when everyone could go to pubs. With the pub scene, the music changed to rock'n'roll and more guitar playing."*

These remarks are strongly endorsed by Elizabeth Burchill<sup>16</sup> writing about the same period"

*"T.I. lacked the organized sport of cities but we exercised by swimming, day or night, at Hospital Point in the shark-proof pool or playing tennis on the town courts at the other end of the island. We fished off the wharf and went boating at weekends. ... Thursday Islanders filled their nights with laughter, music, singing and dancing. Hospital nursing aides when off-duty inevitably dance. Flower-decked hair, thudding bare feet, and swinging bodies move rhythmically to the sound of guitars, drums and handclapping. They sang the haunting melodies of their forebears years ago but now many have chosen the mainland pop tunes and use electric guitars for accompaniment."*

From Rees<sup>17</sup>, pages 69-72:

*Coasts of Cape York*

From the air Thursday Island had certainly looked like an uncut emerald in a liquid opal setting, but as we came closer some of the hills showed balding patches where the sandy-coloured rock poked through, a presage of more dun-hued days as the dry winter season wore on. It was like a pocket edition of Port Moresby, about four hundred miles to the east-north-east across the Gulf of Papua: rounded hills, white buildings on the far points, and the south-east trade wind blowing restlessly and relentlessly, so that you longed for it to die down, and when it did die down you realized you were about ten degrees below the Equator, and you longed for it to blow again.

The foreshores of Port Kennedy (a name never used) are not those of a pleasure resort: we found them lackadaisically functional, with a desecrating disregard for beauty. There were slipways for repairing luggers, with skeleton cradles, rigging, hawsers, and old sails; a fringe of rusty scrap-iron, rotting barnacled timbers, empty drums; a ship's chandlery; and shell stores, where the shell was brought ashore in bags, unloaded, graded, and packed in wooden boxes labelled "New York".

Along towards the eastern end of the island was the quarter called Yokohama, where the Jap. divers lived hard and high during the rich lay-ups in the years between the two wars. Back a little from the waterfront was the long main street that stretched almost the length of the island. Down the jetty end were the shops, some run by whites, one by Japanese, some by Chinese. The customers padding into See Hop and Company and Li Fu's were all coloured—of various gradations. There were plump, genial island women black as midnight, Malays with straight blue-black hair, descendants of Filipinos and of Samoans, and some lank-shanked mainland aborigines. The women and little girls were in bright-patterned cotton frocks and most were barefooted. In a corner saloon coloured men played snooker. There were two big general supply stores—one run by the Island Industries Board and the other by the Pacific Islands firm of Burns Philp. A double-fronted shop managed by an alert Cingalese, with a beautiful *sari'd* wife, specialized in "high-class jewellery and world-renowned watches", but also sold shirts, gramophone records, newspapers, ice-cream, medicines, biscuits, torches, and films.

Main centres of "Thirsty Island" social life were the four pubs—two-storied, wooden-veranda'd structures, mostly painted brown. Among the population of four hundred whites, little groups flowed in and out of these pubs to toss down Melbourne or Cairns beer, either relaxed in cane lounges among tubs of palms or, the men, more noisily in the bar. Few of the islanders had the legal right to drink alcohol—only the St Paul's Mission boys from Moa Island, because they were said to be originally not Torres people but descended from Samoans. Many other islanders did drink, of course, if they wanted to and when

*Island of Pearl-shell*

they could get it, under the lap-lap, or lava-lava! Not beer, but metho.

This practice of consuming methylated spirit, widespread over the Strait and down the mainland coasts, was regarded with concern by responsible white citizens. A missionary commented to us, "Metho-drinking undermines the health of natives addicted to it—attacks the liver. A lot of people think it would be better if beer-drinking were legalized for them." Another man said, "Of course, methylated spirit has to be issued for lighting purposes, but on our mission we mix it with gentian violet which turns it a ghastly purple colour and doesn't improve its taste." Apart from the metho, sly-grog selling to natives was one of the headaches for the T.I. magistrate, Mr C. V. Daly. He told us, "The chief offence we have to deal with is the illegal supplying of liquor to coloured people, not from hotels but outside them. The penalty is up to fifty pounds' fine or two months' gaol. They prefer to pay."

The most beautiful features of the main street on Thursday Island were its trees: huge shade trees with glossy dark-green leaves, mango-trees, and wild almond-trees whose leaves turned red and yellow. Beyond the shops and beyond the pubs, down the road towards Hospital Point, were the churches—three of them in a row, with their bungalow residences-cum-offices in between—Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian. The Roman Catholic church was architecturally dominant, with its tropic-white spire, but the simple Anglican church held the exalted status of cathedral of the Diocese of Carpentaria. It stood back from the road amid grass and trees and at the wooden entrance gates hung a notice: NO TAXIS INSIDE THE GATES.

Anywhere else this might have been superfluous, but not on T.I. There were twenty taxis among a population of a little over a thousand and the islanders (especially the women, with armfuls of children) loved scorching round in them. They'd hail one at the drop of an eyebrow to take their children to the open-air pictures, to church, or even to school. The standard fare was three shillings a trip, and again a significant little reminder: NO CREDIT GIVEN.

Only one bus operated on Thursday Island. They told us that when it first arrived the island women were so enchanted with the novelty that, if they missed the bus, they would often hire a taxi to overtake it and then transfer.

At the hospital end of the island, the western tip, lay a cluster of bungalow-roofed white official buildings, consisting not only of the hospital but of doctors' and nurses' quarters, the Court-house and the offices of the Department of Native Affairs. And near by, the sports oval right on the waterfront, flanked by tall, flailing, wind-maddened coconut palms. Here on a Sunday afternoon we watched burly island males of all colours as they faced each other, pulled up their woollen football socks, and tore into a bullocking game of Rugby.

<sup>16</sup> *Thursday Island Nurse*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>17</sup> Rees, Coaralie and Leslie, *Coasts of Cape York*, Angus & Robertson, London, Sydney, 1960.

## Childhood amusements

A delightful description of carefree, happy, childhood days is given by Mehendra Mendis through an interview he did with the editors of “*Navigating Boundries*”.<sup>18</sup> He recalled: “*We had a marvelous life. I never felt unsafe. ... We would ...go swimming on those wonderful days when the tides were high and the water was perfectly clear and warm. You could see the white sand at the bottom. We would play for hours. We kids used to wander everywhere. ... I think the younger group [in approx. 2000] don’t have the same fun as we used to. ... When I was growing up, distance wasn’t a problem. You walked everywhere.*”

Lynda Ah Mat has a wonderful description<sup>19</sup> of kids making canoes out of old metal, tar and wood. It evokes the earlier, simpler, care-free lifestyle of children of the time:

*“As there were very limited things to do as children, we used to take empty, cleaned-out food tins or plastic containers and steal fresh tar from the bitumen roads, after the council workers put it down. The boys would get old sheets of copper from the side of the house or the roof or the dump – wherever they could – and get two pieces of wood and bend the copper up making a kappa kenu (copper canoe). They would nail the wood to each end and any holes in the copper would be tarred up so the canoe would float. Then we would carry the canoe down to the beach or even the small wharf, where the baths (rock pool) were, where the local kids used to swim and sometimes test the canoes. The big wharf was mainly for the big boats and we would get into trouble if we were caught by the waterside workers. Some of the canoes sank to the bottom and I’m sure they’re still down there.*

*Well they’ve probably put cement over the top of them, as it is now a car park. The more daring ones would canoe out to the buoys about 40-50 metres out from the wharf. If they got caught by the adults, they would get in big trouble and warned about sharks going to eat them.”*

## Correction to a mention in *Bringing Them Home*

A very important Report, *Bringing Them Home*, was presented in 1997 detailing the story of “The Stolen Generation”, those indigenous children forcibly taken from their parents. The Report states<sup>20</sup>:

*“Until the 1970s church representatives in the Torres Strait Islands would notify the Department of Native Affairs of pregnancies and parentage and the Department would then arrange for girls to be placed in the Catholic Convent dormitory on Thursday Island while boys were often adopted out to Islander families.”*

This is a curious statement in light of the fact that the “Orphanage”, as it was called, conducted by the “Catholic Convent” on T.I., ceased to take anyone after 1948, and in 1962 the two floors of the building were converted to school use. “Until the 1970’s” is certainly in error.

## Migration to the mainland

Jeremy Hodes<sup>21</sup> has done a study of the migration of Torres Strait Islander people to the mainland, particularly Cairns. He says of the 1950’s: “*The third and largest migration wave occurred from the 1950s onwards as people moved south in search of employment and a better life for themselves and their children.*” This became a trend that would accelerate over time. And earlier it was noted: “*By 1964, over 1,000 Island people had moved to communities outside their own islands. And this number has increased steadily over the years.* [Written 1977]”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Shnukal et al, editors, pp.294-5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.308.

<sup>20</sup> From an internet posting of the Report, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Hodes, J. *Torres Strait Islander Migration to Cairns Before WWII*, Cairns Libraries, 1998, p.3.

<sup>22</sup> *My Island Home*, pp.8-9.



(Photo from Bill Snell's pics of 1963, posted on the net)

### Natural charm and untidiness

If you depended on Bernard Millen for a description of T.I. in 1960 you would come away with the idea of a perfect paradise.<sup>23</sup> He wrote:

*"To those who dream of leaving the cares and stress of city life behind to walk on golden sands beneath rustling palms, to plunge in crystal clear waters, laze in the constant sun and catch huge fish, Thursday Island is a dream come solid.*

*It is a 'picture-book island with vivid green jungle growth and silver sanded beaches a few swimming strokes from the incredible beauty of the Great Barrier Reef.' ...*

*"Fine big men and intelligent, the ebony-bodied Islanders are likeable and friendly people. ...*

*"There is also a busy fleet of 21 taxis mostly owned by Islanders, who charge a minimum fare of 3/- a head and 3/- a mile for each person. And grocery shops, emporiums, shops for sporting goods, greengroceries, chemists, hotels, cafes and an open-air cinema are all helping to spread the economic jam a little thicker than in previous years. ...*

*"Unconventional dress is reinforced by a warm friendliness between all sections of the community. Because the inhabitants find themselves dependent on their own inventiveness for entertainment, they fill the gap by making friends not only with their own neighbours but with people from all walks of life. Cocktail parties in private homes at which hostesses outdo one another in providing delicious food, take the place of visits to theatres and night-clubbing. ...*

<sup>23</sup> Millen, B., *Pearly Gateway of Coral Sea*, in *Nautilus*, (magazine), 1960, December



"To offset the crowded bars that cater for a hard-drinking clientele there are six clergymen, three churches and a convent. Of the three schools one is purely aboriginal. There are also a variety of organizations – the Chamber of Commerce, Freemason's, Oddfellows' and Buffaloes Lodges and a Country Women's Association."

Another visitor, in the following year, 1961, was equally impressed. Ashley Hill, writing in the *North Australian Monthly*<sup>24</sup> called his visit to T.I., "T.I.' – and a holiday of a lifetime." He recalls, on his first glimpse of T.I.:

"We rubbed our eyes! We couldn't believe the incredible feast of vivid colour. Surely this could not be real? But it was, this was 'T.I.', and cameras were produced to record and prove it later. It was better and more picturesque than any travel poster."

### Minister suggests industries

There has never been a lack of suggestions for industries that might be established on Thursday Island. The Minister for Labour and Industry, Hon. K.J. Morris, in 1960 made several suggestions which can be read in the attached page from the *Torres News* of June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

(The letter, bearing Thursday Island postmarks, shows stamps commemorating Queen Elizabeth's Coronation in 1963.)



In the accompanying extract from the *Torres News* of 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1957 can be read another visitor's impressions.

TUESDAY 26th JUNE 1960 TORRES NEWS PAGE 5

Q.A.T.B. CARNAVAL.  
KNOCK 'EM... HOOF-La... ISLAND MATS SPEARS GRASS SHIRTS.

## Minister Visits ISLAND

At 7p.m. last Wednesday evening the Hon. K.J. Morris, Minister for Labour and Industry received the various delegations at the Town hall after which an informal supper was held at the Federal Hotel.

During the evening Mr. Morris was introduced to all present and after supper, Mr. Allen, host for the evening, representing Mr. McNamara, Administrator of Local Government, asked the Lord Bishop to say a few words. The Bishop during his short speech told the Minister the people on T.I. felt rather at the end of the line being so far away from the cities but now the Minister himself had paid us a visit and seen the Island he felt sure he would do all he could for us. The Bishop also mentioned he hoped someone had remembered to give Mr. Morris a Wongai.

In his reply Mr. Morris said T.I. had great tourist potentials he himself had visited us because he was deeply interested in the far north, he felt the people of the Island could do a lot for themselves if they formed a Tourist development Committee and worked towards attracting the tourist. Tourists are big business, said Mr. Morris, last year £30 million was spent by tourists in Qld. and the tourist trade employed no less than 30 to 40 thousand people. It is not only the air lines and shipping companies who benefit but practically everyone in the community, such as the people who supply the food, the souvenir

maker and the transport section, they are all helped by the industry and statistics show they benefit more than the shipping and air lines. He said its the little things like smiling faces and cheerful workers who make the place one to be remembered he also mentioned he had noticed when he entered his room at the Federal Hotel someone had placed a vase of Cooktown orchids on his table, these are the little things which help to make the tourist feel he's wanted and so he will come back again and again. He realized fares were a drawback to this part of Australia but he felt in years to come we would become part of a world wide circuit for overseas tourists. These were the ones Australia were trying to encourage. However he felt we had a great attraction here with the pearling industry, we could offer good shooting at the Jardine Swamps, deep sea fishing at the outer Islands, delightful weather and many beauty spots of interest. This is the first visit to the north for Mr. Morris private Secretary Mr. Johnston, and T.I. seems to have found a keen enthusiast in him, he says its one of the prettiest Islands he had yet seen. Guests at the supper included Bishop Hudson, Rev. Fr. Docherty, Fr. Rogers, Rev. McNicol, Misses M. McNulty, E. Mills, Mrs. R. Kirk, J. Ryan, E. James, J. Toohy, C. Mill, McKenna, Dr. & Mrs. Woolford, Mairon McLar, Mr. & Mrs. Farquhar, Mr. & Mrs. T. Loban, Mr. & Mrs. G. Laifoo, Mr. & Mrs. A. Mortensen, Mr. & Mrs. Aldrum, Mr. & Mrs. R. Fell, Mr. & Mrs. Radke, Mr. & Mrs. J. Moloney, Mrs. Townsend, Mrs. P. Killoran, Sgt. & Mrs. J. Rawlings, Mr. & Mrs. M. Blackband, Mr. C. Waller.

The delicious supper of Chinese and local dishes was the work of Mr. & Mrs. Fred Chin Soon.

TUESDAY 6th OCTOBER 1957 TORRES NEWS PAGE 6

PASS THE MAN A WONGAI.

(By Alan Underwood visiting special correspondent of the Courier Mail.)

WONGAI seems out of season otherwise I should like to nibble on before I fly back to Brisbane.

Last time I was here (seven years ago) I did not eat the wongai, as I did my first trip (1940). But in 1950 Thursday Island despite all its natural beauty was a pretty sad looking place.

What do I think about it now?

Between planes is not very long for a thorough look round. But believe me, I see 1957 Thursday Island as a brighter, better spot -- and island community with fresh hope.

Sure-water is scarce, there's a leak somewhere in that dam; You could do with some roads and footpaths; the wharves would be better with a new plank here and there; empty shops are for sale cheap; one or two buildings would look better with a coat of paint -----

Sure - its easy to pile up a list of things like that. Especially for me. I don't live here. I'm a professional tourist.

But there is now talk here of new things.

Weipa is moving. The Japanese pearlers are coming back.

You can argue whichever way you

like about Weipa. But I say that if Thursday Island gets on the ball, it can win a good share of Weipa business. But you will not win business if you don't try. T.I. must sell itself.

You can argue and sulk about the Japs depending where your interests lie. But it looks as if the Japs are coming again. And not many, even among the Diggers who fought them, really care a hoot. If it suits Aussies to use Japs-lets use them. We fought the Germans too; but theres a long Australian waiting list of buyers for Volkswagens.

Can YOU make a move to help T.I.?

I'm sure if I did live here I'd take a darned-sight greater interest in the Island than most people are showing now.

Moves are being made to re-form the Council. Are they real moves?

Do they have the backing of the main body of people at T.I.? Does this shadow council now being named in gossip contain names of the right Calibre? Is there a woman prepared to be an alderman?/.

If you re-establish the Thursday Island Council, make sure this time that it is going to stay established.

There are people here who love Thursday Island as their home, and the home of their children and grandchildren, and there are people who just want Thursday Island for what they can get.

If you live on Thursday Island, you lucky people, make it your home.

Because- that way you're more likely to keep it tidy.

Good Luck! Good Pearling! and may the Bauxite ships never pass without calling.

<sup>24</sup> February, 1961, Pp. 4-6 and 17.





## CHAPTER 25

### Completion of the apostolate on Thursday Island of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, 1967

1967 is a sad year for the Sacred Heart School and for the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. It brought to an end a long period of most extraordinarily dedicated service to the Catholic parents and children of Thursday Island.

In the chapter on the changes in the Church in the 1960s it would have been noticed that there were fewer religious in most religious congregations as the 1960s progressed and that many of those who were continuing were reaching retirement age and beyond.

And so it happened with the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Forebodings might be found in a letter of the Parish Priest of the time, Fr. B. Baldwin, M.S.C., to Fr. John Lennon, the Bishop's secretary, dated 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1967:

*"Sister Killian is back in her convent after two months in the local hospital recovering from a coronary. Sister Antonia who was sent up "just to be there" – she has a collapsed lung – has revived tremendously and is now full blast with the first communion class. But we have only up to fourth class in the parish school, one paid teacher paid off and was not replaced."*



(Picture: Sister Killian)

In the same letter Father Baldwin gives the following figures:

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Convent	22 boys	29 girls
State School primary Catholics	28 boys	35 girls
State School Secondary	11 boys	15 girls

The Bishop of each diocese is responsible for the provision of Catholic education in his diocese, and in 1967 the Bishop of Cairns was Thomas Cahill. Bishop Cahill had only very recently been given the responsibility for the pastoral care of all the Catholics in the Torres Strait.<sup>1</sup> And not long after taking up this responsibility Bishop Cahill received a letter from the Provincial of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Mother M. Gerarda, explaining that the Sisters could not continue.

In his letter of reply Bishop Cahill wrote<sup>2</sup>:

*"I know very little about Thursday Island as yet, because I haven't heard from the Sisters themselves at all and all I know is from a short conversation with Father Baldwin when he visited here last month. However there is no doubt that it would be disastrous to leave Thursday Island without Sisters. To have Sisters who cannot teach would be much better than to have no Sisters at all.*

*"Therefore, if no Sisters are available I accept your proposition to let the present two Sisters remain and give religious instruction and visit the people, etc. As regards the school, perhaps some lay teachers or lay missionaries can be found to keep the school going for the time being. However this will be a matter for my successor and the priests. As I am leaving the diocese shortly, there is very little I can do, and it may be some time before a new bishop is appointed.*

*"I have approached other Sisters asking them to take over Thursday Island, but my efforts have been completely in vain. I see no hope at present of getting other Sisters to take over the Mission. Therefore I appeal to you to allow your Sisters to remain at Thursday Island until such time as other provision can be made."*

By June, 1967, word was out that the Sisters were withdrawing. Various parents were inspired to write to the Bishop strenuously expressing their worries that the school may be left without Sisters. For the reader to understand more fully the situation and the anxieties of the parents a letter from the President of the Parents and Friends Organisation, dated 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1967, is reproduced in facsimile in the following pages.

On behalf of Mother Gerarda, who was in Rome for a meeting of provincials, Sister Mary Pauline wrote back to Bishop Cahill on 14<sup>th</sup> June thanking him for his understanding. She wrote, inter alia:

<sup>1</sup> A document in Latin confirmed this transfer of authority and it was dated: "Datum Romae, ex Aedibus eiusdem Sacre Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, die mensis Februarii anno Domini 1967."

<sup>2</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1967.

*"It will indeed make their [the Sisters'] position tenable for the present if, as you agree, they could devote their time to giving religious instruction, visiting the people and so on, whilst some lay teachers or lay missionaries might take over the management of the school. We hope and pray that the priests there will be able to find such teachers, at least for the present, and that ultimately this important work will be taken over by religious."*

By June 20<sup>th</sup> Father Miah McSweeney wrote to Bishop Cahill:

*"Thank you for your letter which arrived this morning. The position here at present is far from happy, with the school situation being discussed by all and sundry."*

Because Father Miah McSweeney has such an important place in the history of the Sacred Heart Mission in the second half of the twentieth century it was thought wise to include the final paragraph of this letter to put readers in touch with this wonderful pastor. Over the years he wrote numerous letters to the Bishop always in support and in advocacy of the people of T.I. and the Mission.

*a bit embarrassing.  
I'm so sick of the word school, I'm tempted to push it into the sea. I'd say he'll be here another week or 2 & as he and the Sisters are at cross purposes, it's a bit embarrassing. I'm so sick of the word school, I'm tempted to push it into the sea.  
I'm going to meet Pat at Waipia on July 18, so we could both catch the same plane. The last confirmation here was in May 1965, so there would be 2 years to do, if you feel inclined. I'm going to the State School tomorrow, so I could send you the exact number. I'll write again in a week with the next episode. Reminds me a bit of 1954-55. An interesting feature of the house here, is that there is no kitchen. This is a really quaint idea, and makes eating quite an adventure. I hope you are standing up to the strain of your last month in Cairns & that all the priests are well.  
Yours obediently  
Miah McSweeney*

Talk about "closing the school" was in the air as something that nobody wanted and many feared. In the second page of his letter Father McSweeney (pictured) continues:

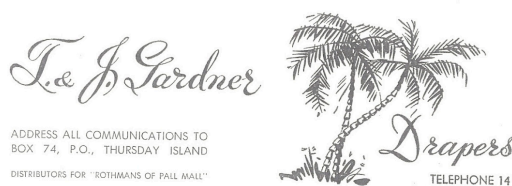
*"Two further reasons for not closing the school are these:- as the T.I. school is in effect the Hammond Is. School we could lose a considerable part of the subsidy; the State School does not want any more children, or this would necessitate more teachers or rooms or both. This from Fr. Baldwin, I haven't checked it. If this is true and the State School went to that trouble, it would be difficult to open up again. The whole thing boils down to next year. If there will be nuns here, I should be able to dodge around the rest of the year. Killoran says that for the place to be left without Sisters would be a disaster. He is going to call on you in the next two weeks to discuss it and is then coming back to discuss it here. Fr. Baldwin is a bit hard to get on with, but I would say that the major part of the blame must be attributed to the Sisters who seem to have been breeding discontent among the people. Fr. Baldwin has forbidden them to visit, but I've put them back on to the hospital on a start, so our relations are good. Fr. Baldwin and I get along OK, but I wish he'd go. I'd say he'll be here another week or 2 & as he and the Sisters are at cross purposes, it's a bit embarrassing." I'm so sick of the word school, I'm tempted to push it into the sea."*



But in characteristic Fr. McSweeney manner he ends, as you can see, with a humorous remark and kindly greeting:

*"An interesting feature of the house here, is that there is no kitchen. This is a really quaint idea, and makes eating quite an adventure. I hope you are standing up to the strain of your last month in Cairns and that all the priests are well."*





ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO  
BOX 74, P.O., THURSDAY ISLAND

DISTRIBUTORS FOR "ROTHMANS OF FALL MALL"

Bishop T. Cahill,  
Bishop House,  
CAIRNS. QUEENSLAND.

5th June, 1967.

My Lord,

It is with considerable regret that I am writing to you, concerning a matter that has for some time been worsening. It is the problem, and a very serious one, of the position of Catholic Education on Thursday Island. I am speaking to you on behalf of the Convent Sisters, the members of the Parents and Friends Organization and some very concerned Catholic Parents.

As things stand now... we have 51 children up to and including Grade 4. There is to teach this number, 1 qualified teaching sister, and 1 other, a Dutch woman Mrs. Verfeuden, who has been in Australia for a period of only five years. She is a mother of three children under the age of six, and originally offered her services for as much as she felt she could cope with, because we were in urgent need for teachers. She has admitted to the Committee of the P. & C. that her phrasing and pronunciation of English is at times very awkward, and hard to understand. Although we acknowledge that she is doing a wonderful job, it is a little hard on the children as well as herself. An Island girl is "helping" with a class, who has had absolutely no training whatever. The present system thus is hopeless.

The Sisters themselves have stated that they cannot cope, and are certain that the children are not receiving proper education, and in fact are being deprived of it. The situation is chronic as far as teachers are concerned, and it appears cannot be improved, as there is a big shortage at this time. Already some children have had to transfer to the State School, much to their parent's regret. Community feeling is mainly a complaint of not knowing exactly what is to be done about it, or whether anything will be, especially in view of the inconsistency of reports from authority earlier in the year.

Were there the required number of fully-trained teachers available, many parents would be only too happy to place their children in the Convent School. As it is now, with only two teachers handling all four (4) Grades, (with the possibility of Mrs. Verfeuden having to leave eventually) the position is impossible, and can only get worse.

T. & J. GARDNER

Unfortunately such teachers are not available, and we, the Committee, the parents, the Sisters and the community have no idea or solution as to how Catholic Education can be maintained on this Island, without greatly affecting the educational standard, which at the best of times is not high, due mainly of course to the high numbers of Islander pupils. I am sorry to say it, but it has been suggested and strongly endorsed by all previously mentioned that the Convent School close down, with your grace.

This way, the Sisters could concentrate on home visitations, visits to the State School, the sick and the poor, and hold classes to make ready the kiddies for their First Holy Communion.

The alternative to this, is that Sister Antonita and Mrs. Verfeuden continue to teach Grades 1 & 2, to make the children ready for their First Holy Communion, and thus continue normal school curriculum for those two Grades. The above-mentioned are the wishes of all the Catholics on Thursday Island.

In time to come, there would be no problem in reopening the Convent School, should the necessary number of trained teachers be available.

If these suggestions can be carried out, it will strengthen and bolster the community morale, as it is the uncertainty and instability of the schooling system at present, (and for the last twelve months,) that has led to this deputation.

It is indeed hoped that with the arrival of our new parish Priest, Father McSweeney, the community will enjoy the morale and togetherness we had two years ago.

My Lord, I appeal to you on behalf of the Sisters, the parents and the children, that the decision you make will be favourable to all concerned on T.I., in taking either of the two suggested courses, with regard to the serious problem confronting Catholic Education.

Yours faithfully,

*T. & J. Gardner*  
PRESIDENT  
Parents and Friends Organization

Bishop Cahill replied on 13<sup>th</sup> June:

*"I am grateful to you for writing and appreciate the present situation. I have been in communication with Mother Provincial of the Sisters and am awaiting a further letter from her. Much depends on whether there will be even one Sister who can teach in the school. As soon as I know the exact situation, a decision will be made."*

He goes on to say that Father Miah McSweeney is due at the end of the week and is sure the Catholic community will give him every cooperation and assistance.

By the middle of July, happily and providentially, Bishop Cahill was able to write to Mother M. Gerarda telling her,

*"I am happy to be able to advise you that the Sisters of Mercy of this Diocese have accepted to provide a community for Thursday Island as from the beginning of next year (1968). Your Sisters will therefore be free to leave at the end of this year."*

And so the grand period of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart on Thursday Island, (1887-1967) ended smoothly with a hand-over to the Cairns Sisters of Mercy.

The Provincial Superior of the Sisters, Sister M. Gerarda, composed a farewell letter to the "Dear People of Thursday Island", dated 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1967<sup>3</sup>. It read in part:

*"The Sisters who have been in Thursday Island these last seventy years have indeed found great happiness in living and working with you. This island has been a very happy home for so many, a vineyard where they have found joy in working for the Sacred Heart of Christ our King. Children and people and those who have gone before you have endeared themselves to our Sisters. We thank you for all you have done for us through all these years, in little ways and great, with all the generosity of your hearts. Always you will retain a secure place not only in our memories, but even more in our prayers. It is a happy fact that you have given to us two of your own children to be Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. They will be living reminders to us for many years to come of all that Thursday Island and its people have been in the history of our congregation."*

<sup>3</sup> Copy in the archives of the Sisters, Kensington, N.S.W.

*And now, we are very grateful that the Sisters of Mercy are coming to continue our work here. They too will know your warm-hearted welcome and support, and this new chapter in your history will witness fresh vitality and fuller growth."*

The people of Thursday Island and Hammond Island gave the Sisters a grand farewell and send-off. It is here recorded by Sister Mary Christopher Cleary:

Copy 10/07/2009  
M.A.

**DAUGHTERS OF OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART**  
**FAREWELL FROM THURSDAY AND HAMMOND ISLANDS**

(by Sr MC Christopher Cleary - 14.7.66)

The Year 1967 symbolised a year of transition for the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart since it was our last year in Thursday Island and of our continued contact with the people of Hammond Island. These islands of the Torres Strait had been the scene of our labours since our first Sisters took up residence there on January 12, 1886. During these years, the people had come to know and love the Sisters, so it was a heartrending blow for them when told that the Sisters would be leaving at the end of the year.

I will briefly recapitulate the main events of 1967. Sister Kilian (Winifred Crosdale) and myself were the only two Sisters who returned to Thursday Island in January of that year. We were there for only three weeks when Sister Kilian was hospitalised following a heart attack. She was in school in the morning and in hospital in the afternoon. Sister was in hospital for several weeks and during most of this time I "carried on" by myself. I temporarily took over Sister's class with Mary Dorante (Jnr) as assistant. She had already been helping Sister Kilian. I had quite a busy time with all the added "chores", church etc. Fortunately, we had very good friends who rallied to our aid during this time. We had a lady from Hammond Island helping in the house so this relieved me of most of the house-work, washing, ironing and so on.

McNulty was an old family name in Thursday island. In fact, the first Mass on the island was celebrated in McNulty's Hotel. However, when I went to Thursday Island in 1966, only one member of the McNulty family, Maggie, was still living. She had sold the hotel on condition that she still had a "home" in it, which was the case until her death in 1966. The hotel had been taken over by the Vallebo's, a Spanish-Filipino family. When one entered the hotel dining-room, from the side door, on the opposite wall, the first object that met the eye was a very large picture of the Sacred Heart. When Mrs Vallebo heard that Sister Kilian was in hospital, she immediately sent a message to say that the evening meal would be supplied from the hotel. Accordingly, each evening at approximately 6.00 p.m. a beautifully cooked and served meal, wrapped in a large white serviette, arrived from the hotel. Sister in hospital was not forgotten either as often a thermos of soup and other dainty morsels, including fruit, were sent from the hotel for her. The family even sent to Cairns to get special delicacies for Sister. Joy la Foo, also a member of the Vallebo



people were in good spirits and gave us an evening to be remembered. There were many stories told and the people expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the Sisters for the work that had been done for them over the years.

We were travelling from Thursday Island by ship and finally 9th November, 1967, the day of our departure arrived. With sad hearts we locked the convent and made our way to the wharf at approximately 4.00 p.m. Some people had gathered at the wharf to say a final “goodbye”. As the ship raised anchor and slowly moved out into the passage, we stood on deck gazing shore wards, bidding farewell to the Island and our friends on the wharf. The convent on the hill, the home of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart for eighty-one years, was silhouetted against the rays of the setting sun.

As Thursday Island faded into the distance, the ship steamed through the passage at the back of Hammond Island, and there a wonderful, unique farewell was staged by the people. We had been told to look out for them as they would be waiting on the hill as the ship passed by. We eagerly looked towards the hill, and the scene that met our eyes was very moving. On it stood a crowd of people waving large, white cloths and flashing mirrors and others objects that reflected the sun. In turn, we waved back with our handkerchiefs and a small mirror. Some of the passengers became interested in the proceedings. When we explained the situation, some of them disappeared and returned with white tea towels and large mirrors and they joined us as signals went from ship to shore until lack of visibility called a halt. Then, as dusk was merging into darkness, a huge bonfire was lit. Our last glimpse of Hammond Island was a spectacle never to be forgotten - a crowd of waving figures illumined against the “dancing” flames of the bonfire. We watched even after the Island was shrouded in darkness and the pink glow still to be seen spoke to us of the love and loyalty of the Hammond Island people as they bade us goodbye. Thus, a long chapter in the history of the Australian Province came to an end.





## CHAPTER 26

### Beginning of the Cairns Sisters of Mercy, and period 1968-1974



General rejoicing and relief greeted the news that the school would have Sisters in 1968 in the persons of Cairns Sisters of Mercy who were coming to Thursday Island to replace the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in the School.<sup>1</sup>

(Photo shows Sister Mary Joan Ormond, Sister Mary Oliver O'Halloran (visiting Mother General), Sister Mary Consilia Wallwork)



Bishop Cahill received a letter of thanks and gratitude from John Gardner. This appears, however, to have been before he knew for certain that the Bishop had secured the services of the Mercy Sisters. He wrote:

*"Your Grace,  
This time I am writing to you a letter of thanks.  
However firstly dealing with your reply to my letter to you.  
It is with relief, that I note reading between the lines, that you are and were aware of the position on T.I. It certainly was not a happy one, and in fact we have lost many Catholics from our Faith. One person incidentally has become a Minister of the "Pentacosts."  
Concerning the Convent School. Your letter along with a talk to Father McSweeney has indeed put much hope in me that it will remain open. It is something nobody wants to see closed, least of all myself, ..."*

His letter continues with a deep appreciation of Father McSweeney and gratitude to the Bishop for sending him. While this narrative is mainly that of the School, it should be remembered that this year was the final year of the Missionaries of



the Sacred Heart priests in the parish and in the Torres Straits generally. So the Catholic people were suffering the loss of not only the Sisters but also the Fathers.

But then came Father Miah McSweeney who would remain for fifteen years of devoted service, till 1982.

(Photo shows children with Sister Concilia, approx. 1979.)

<sup>1</sup> The illustration of a wooden "Mercy Cross" beginning this Chapter was presented to the T.I. Church on the occasion of the "120 years of ministry in the Diocese of Cairns" of the Sisters, beginning their apostolate in Cooktown in 1888.

## Highlights of the Mercy Sisters' first year

The first Sisters to arrive in 1968 were Sr. M. Joan Ormonde, Sr. M. Consilia Wallwork and Sr. M. Matthew Rush and Sr. M. Raphael, and were followed by Sr. Patricia Butterfield in 1969.

Writing on Trinity Sunday Sister Margaret Rush<sup>2</sup> noted rather ruefully:

*"April 'May' have glided into June with such rapidity, that I am somewhat perplexed – mid-year and nothing done. Our first term was quite interesting but not 'quiet'. Nocturnal drunken brawls and baying of dogs make rare harmony and produce appropriate atmosphere for 'sound' slumber."*



Sister continues with stories of the blessing of the tools on St. Joseph's Feast Day on Hammond Island and the introduction to the Sisters of the customs of catching turtle and dugong and preparing them for a feast. She tells of a flight to Daru and observing the many tiny islands from the sky. There is mention, too, of the School's Sports Day on Hammond Island. The children from T.I. were taken over on a De Havilland barge, the same kind as was used in the Vietnam War. Photos of the children at the Sports show them in their gold sports colours. *"A keen competitive spirit was in evidence throughout the day as each of the two competing houses vied with each other for the coveted Mercy Shield."*

There was a school inspection in 1968 which seems to have gone well. *"The next item of interest was the Inspector's visit to the school. He came on Thursday and Friday. I think he enjoyed his stay and we enjoyed having him."* The Inspection was by Inspector D. Christiansen who had written the Inspection in the second-last year of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, in 1966. His visit was in May<sup>3</sup> and he opens with the remark: *"The difficult period that this school passed through last year now appears to have come to an end."* The roll is already 75, an improvement on the 52 of the previous year.

*"Government of the School is firm but this firmness is tempered by the Teachers' patience and sympathetic understanding of the environmental problems faced by many of the pupils. The Sister-in-Charge [ Sister Margaret Rush] enjoys the loyal support of two experienced and competent Teaching Sisters and a young Teacher-Aide."*

*"Pupils were neatly attired in the attractive School uniform. They were friendly and courteous and worked well when not under direct supervision. Teacher/Pupil relationships were good and the tone of the School must be classed as healthy."*

*"All minor aspects of organisation have been attended to with extreme care and as a result the School functions smoothly and efficiently."*

It's interesting to notice that the school in this year, 1968, only has Grades I to V, though it is remarked that the plan is for the school to grow yearly until pupils are enrolled in Grade VII.

With the successful Inspection out of the way another highlight of the first year was the visit of Mother General, Mother Mary Oliver, "or 'General Mother' as the Islanders called her." Besides visiting the school there was an "exotic feast" on Hammond Island to enjoy including turtle, dugong and pig's blood. Later the Sisters holidayed on Hammond Island which included "boat rides, fishing and swims" in their activities.

Then there was the Ball: *"Monsignor Mullins arrives on Friday to receive the debts at our coming Ball. The debts being Islanders are having a hard time trying to balance in Cuban-heeled shoes – the curtsy in long-tight dresses, best imagined than described. Europeans are partnering them, save for a few."*<sup>4</sup>

## Religious Education syllabus, 1968

The parents and children of the T.I. school probably remained relatively unaware that the school, in 1968, passed from the responsibility of the Bishop of Darwin to the Bishop of Cairns. And in November of that year the Director of Catholic Education of the Cairns Diocese issued a new syllabus in Religious Education.<sup>5</sup> It set out the texts to be used in each grade. On the whole the texts to be used were "My Way to God" for Grades II-V and the "Catholic Catechism" for Grades VI and VII.

<sup>2</sup> For many years Sister Margaret was known as Sister Matthew. At the time Sister arrived on T.I. she was known by her profession name of Sister Mary Matthew. But many Sisters changed back to their Baptismal names. This is what Sister Margaret did. From now on Sister Matthew will be referred to as Sister Margaret.

<sup>3</sup> 30<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> May, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of Sister Margaret.

<sup>5</sup> Diocese of Cairns Archives.

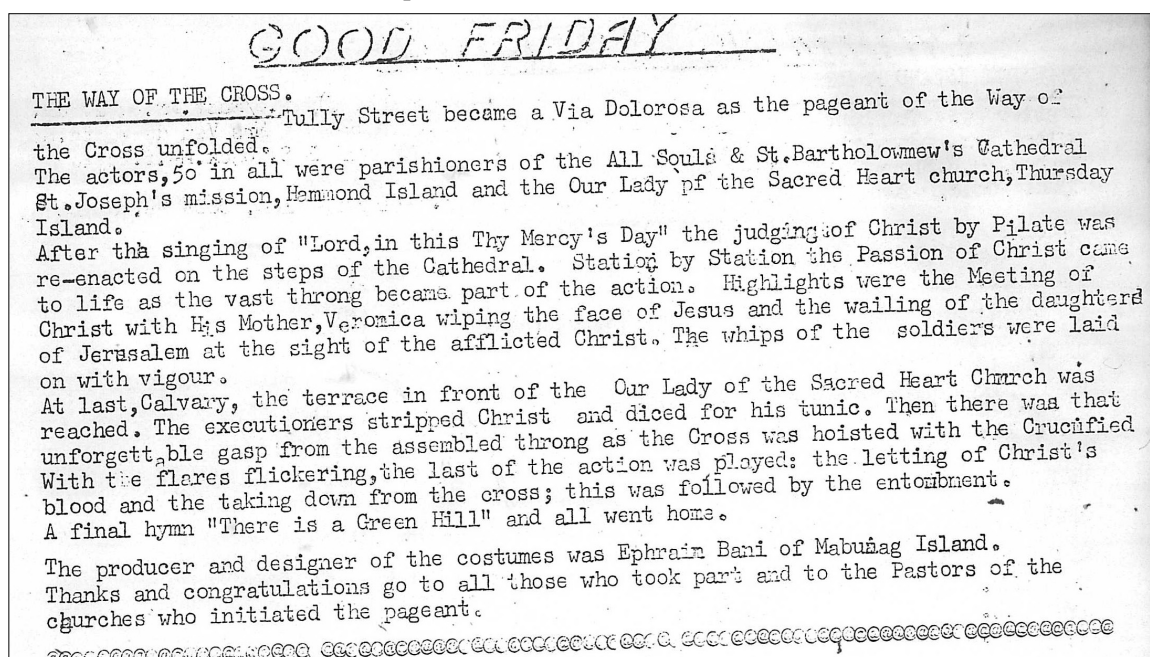


It is interesting to note that under a special heading of "ROTE WORK": *"Prayers listed in the various books are to be memorised. There is still place in the teaching of Christian Doctrine for memorisation. All catechism questions and answers for example should be known by heart, as should the ten commandments, lists of Holy Days of Obligation, ..."*

Another heading was "ACTIVITY WORK": *"This is to be encouraged at all levels. Project work, Dramatisation, mime, etc should be an integral part of the teaching process, and so far as possible ought to be the children's own work, expressing in a creative fashion their own response to the matter taught. As soon as they are capable of it, each child is to possess his own project book."*

### A peep at 1969

Ecumenical cooperation with the Anglican community of the time is reflected in a couple of activities during 1969. First of all the Way of the Cross in Holy Week of that year was a combined affair. The attached facsimile is from the *Torres News* of April 1st, 1969.



A further example of cooperation amongst the churches in 1969 was reported in the *Torres News* of July 8<sup>th</sup> as "THE COMING OF THE LIGHT GOES ECUMENICAL". There had been a long-standing tradition for the Anglican community to commemorate the anniversary of the first preaching of the Gospel on Darnley Island on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1871. Even though the London Missionary Society folk who had brought the Christian faith to the Torres Straits were mainly Congregationists, in 1915 they asked the Anglican Diocese of Carpentaria to continue the work. This "Coming of the Light" anniversary was traditionally celebrated with a procession.

In 1969 there was a difference. As reported in the *Torres News* of July 8<sup>th</sup>, we read:

*"This year, for the first time, clergy & people from the Roman Catholic, & Presbyterian congregations of Thurs. Is. joined the Bishop & the cathedral clergy in the procession which moved from the Cathedral through the main streets of the town, returning at midday for the ceremony at the monument, built in the form of a boat surmounted by a cross as a reminder that the Good News was brought across the seas, and which was erected some years ago in honour of the coming of the first missionaries. ... From mid-day on, the Cathedral grounds provided a gay scene with sports, feasting & well into the night, the drums beat and the dancing continued, witnessed by a crowd of well over a thousand. ... There was evident joy among the Anglicans that their separated brethren had shared in this joyful day with them."*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The present researcher was amused on reading this passage in the *Torres News* since throughout his Catholic education and into adult life the Catholic expression for all Protestants had been "our separated brethren".

“History was made” in another way as the *Torres News* declared in its September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1969 issue with the following story about the sports in Weipa:

***PENINSULA SPORTS***

History was made last week end when a party of children from the Torres Strait travelled to Weipa for a sports Carnival. The party included thirty children representing three schools viz. Thursday Island State School, Sacred Heart School Thursday Island and Bamaga. The children were accompanied by their respective head teachers, Mr. D. Josefski, Sister M. Joan, and Mr. R. Holzeimer. Transport to Weipa was graciously provided by the D.A.I.A and the party had the services of a sister from the nursing staff at the Waiben hospital, Sr. M. Corinth.

A detailed description of the Sports and the four-day trip is contained in that particular article. It includes the names of the children taking part from the three schools:

The Thursday Island State School team comprised. Benny Mills, Paul Ah mat, Charles Dorante, Benedict Waigana, James Akee, Annie Stephen, Nancy Cook, Freda Tatipata, Florence Lewin, Harriet Kudub.  
Sacred Heart School team. Stanley Dorante, Eddie Ahwang, Donald Bowie, Tony Titasey, Michael Cowley, Anna Sabatino, Josephine Sabatino, Lucy Mills, Frances Whap, Annie Mairu.  
Bamaga team. Joseph Elu, Richard Sunai, Smithy Hobson, Asia Pablo, Vincent Brown, Pauline Adai, Lucy Ropeyarn, Jennifer Bowie, Mildred Anu, Milcy Walker.

### Difficulties of Catholic Schools, 1970

Parents were put in the picture about the financial situation of the schools in the Cairns Diocese in frank reports that Bishop John Torpie printed and distributed in pamphlet form. Headed “Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Cairns”<sup>7</sup> the text read in part:

*“Parents and children attending Catholic schools in the Diocese of Cairns will be aware of some of the difficulties involved in maintaining our Catholic Education System, especially during the past decade. Increasing enrolments, the reduction of class sizes, the extension and remodeling of existing buildings, new schools, the decrease in vocations to the religious life and the resultant increase in the number of lay teachers employed have all contributed to the problems which we have had to face.” ... By 1968 the financial burden had become all but insupportable and the State Government Grant of \$25.00 for each primary school child in 1969 afforded timely and partial relief. ... The Federal Government in August 1969 entered the field of direct assistance to Independent Schools, and beginning this year [1970], will pay \$35.00 for each primary child ... “In 1970 the total Government assistance for each primary school pupil will be \$60.00.”*

He explains that the entire \$60 will be absorbed in the payment of teachers.

In a similar pamphlet in 1972 Bishop Torpie gives a further explanation of fees and State Aid to parents, and gratefully acknowledges the contribution of Federal and State Governments in their generous assistance in sustaining the schools. He pays tribute, too, to the extraordinary work that the Sisters and Brothers do for the children in the schools.

### Renovations of the convent, 1969

There is an undated letter telling of the trials and tribulations of the renovation of the convent. At one stage there was hardly any “old” kitchen but not yet a “new” kitchen. And holidaying at Hammond Island had its adventures. Attending a cinema evening (or was it over three evenings?) was a memorable occasion:

*“We read, slept, talked and walked and when we attended the “theatre”, the antediluvial projector spluttered and muttered and groaned its way through the most tedious, nerve-racking, hilarious three hours of our life ... what we saw we couldn’t hear and what we heard we didn’t see ... the agony continued for three nights; the theme of the film was incomprehensible.”*

But good news: *“Father plans to build a five-roomed school after the kitchen is finished.”*

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<sup>7</sup> Dated 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1970.

The kitchen referred to, an initiative of Father Miah McSweeney, was a separate building on the northern side of the convent, and included a toilet, shower and laundry and dining area. It was still very much in use at the time of writing (2011), more than 40 years later.



Father McSweeney helped raise the money for the renovation. In a letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1972<sup>8</sup>, he writes: *“The mini-Wells<sup>9</sup> went off quite well raising about \$2500 towards the expenses of the new convent kitchen.”*



(Photo shows Sister Mary Raphael seated precariously on the back of the truck -- the traditional transport of the time; also photo of the kitchen.)

## Crowning of Our Lady

Often recorded by Gwen Moloney in the *Torres News*, the crowning of the statue of Our Lady in May had been a tradition going way back. It was a custom in 1948, but whether before that is not known at the time of writing (2011). Sister's description is thus:

*“On May 31<sup>st</sup> we had the Crowning of Our Lady. The children assembled dressed in white and carried a bouquet which they laid on Our Lady's shrine. The statue was crowned by one of the senior girls, followed by the children's act of consecration.”*

## Sports on Hammond Island



*“Friday saw us all bound for Hammond Island for our annual inter-house sports. At 9.15 a.m. children, parents and friends boarded the T.S.I. and wafted our way to Hammond, whilst the Sun and Jupiter vied with each other to win the day. Over at Hammond all was in readiness. The silver-lined lanes led in ordered perspective down a vista of red flags to a starting line gaily decorated with red and gold bunting. A keen competitive spirit was in evidence throughout the day as each of the two competing houses vied with each other for the coveted Mercy Shield. Gold took the laurels. A tired but happy group sailed home to the strains of “Beautiful T.I.” and other Island songs.”*

Sister Rovenia Duffy recalled her memories of the Sports. She wrote<sup>10</sup>:

*“The yearly Catholic Sports were held at Hammond Island, and Francis Dorante, the Chairman, would mark the lines with silver paint for the various events and the Hammond Island men and women prepared the whole venue for the day. The children of Sacred Heart School would travel by boat to Hammond Island carrying balloons and cheering their teams on. All the events were the same as, and to the standard of, all Queensland schools. The children also competed in interschool sports on Thursday Island later in the Term.”*



## Inter-school sport success, 1972

Father Miah McSweeney writes in November, 1972, to the Bishop<sup>11</sup> with some pride:

<sup>8</sup> Kept in Presbytery archives

<sup>9</sup> The “Wells” organisation was a professional fund-raising organisation. Miah did his own version of Wells fund-raising.

<sup>10</sup> She wrote a memoir in 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Letter 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1972.



*"In the sporting world, the Sacred Heart School junior team won the Athletics Shield and out boys won the D.A.I.A. Rugby League Trophy in a game that had everyone in hysterics. At one stage half of one team was resting on the ground, two boys from the other team were fighting each other and three boys had taken their jumpers off because it was too hot."*

## Confirmation and Communion

*"Sunday was confirmation and First Holy Communion for thirty-eight of our T.I. children, followed by a feast. This gave the Bishop an opportunity to meet the parishioners. Hammond Island prepared an exotic feast for him and his "Retinue" on Mon. Night. A delightful entertainment of Island songs and dances culminated the night."*

(Photo shows Mother General, Sister Mary Oliver, Sister Mary Claver and Sister Mary Annunciata)

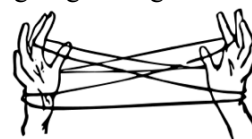


## Memories of students

Dorothy Sagigi came over each day from Hammond Island, starting in roughly 1967, and particularly remembers Sister Oliver and Sister Raphael and Father Flynn<sup>12</sup>. Some children were taught the piano and some from Hammond Island were then able to play the organ to accompany the children and parents in the church there. She remembers the Stations of the Cross in the T.I. church of a Tuesday.

Dorothy was given responsibility to look after the milk which had to be poured into cups for everyone. This may have been part of the government Free Milk scheme of that time. She also had a role in the preparation of meals for the Sisters and to take one to the priest. She claimed these tasks nurtured in her a sense of responsibility which she took through life in the various forms of employment she later gained.

She remembers sitting around in a group and reading *Dick and Dora* stories in unison. She believed this manner of reading assisted those who were slower to learn; and after about three times going through the story together most were able to read alone. Remembered also were the stories from the SRA Reading Laboratory which was a major innovation in the teaching of reading at that time.



In contrast to 2011 children at play running vigorously about, Dorothy recalls the more sedate skipping and hand tapping games were in vogue in the late 70s. String games, too, were recalled. Dorothy mentioned how these were learned at home from the older people and when they played them in the traditional way they were used to illustrate stories. And at the end of each story, with a flick of the fingers the string was completely and instantly un-ravelled again.

(Photo shows Sister Mary Margaret, Sister Mary Paul and Sister Mary Oliver.)

Games children enjoyed included "Water". This was usually played on the beach where a large square was drawn in the sand with quarter circles drawn in each corner where a group or team gathered to begin. There were then attempts to run, without being tagged, to another section of the field. Another game was "Stop" which was played with a tennis ball and bats of stick or bamboo. Opposing teams would endeavour to hit back the ball from an opposing team without allowing the ball to stop. Dorothy mentions that this and other games were sometimes played on the beach at Hammond Island before boarding the barge for school. If, through excitement or a too great desire to win, a child ran into the sea and was soaked, they would rush home to change into dry clothes before returning to join the others on the barge.

<sup>12</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry, September, 2011.

She remembers the barge seats being narrow and there being some water on the floor. And a mischievous child might suddenly nudge another with their bottom causing them to slip into the water and get a wet behind!

Sometimes the children were dropped at the “Federal Beach”, but if dropped at the Rose Hill Landing there was the walk to school over the centre of the island. Children never deviated in their journey to or from school, she recalls. And on Friday, when the Infants class was in operation, she was put in charge of a small child to bring to school, to look after during the day when not in school, and to return home. A considerable responsibility, she remembers.

Another fond memory was the learning of many hymns. And a basketball court was recalled beside the Moloney residence opposite the Royal Hotel. Father Flynn was prominent in basketball promotion.

### School continues to grow

“The school continues to grow,” are the opening words of Inspector E.R. Duke’ Report of 1969<sup>13</sup>. The school roll is given as 90, compared to 75 in the previous year. Inspector Duke continues:

*“Additional grade (Grade 6) commenced this year and a Grade 7 is to be started next year. ... With the intention of an upper grade and growing enrolment in the lower school, the services of an additional teacher for 1970 may be required for equable teaching.”*

The inspector notes that a large majority of the pupils are turned out in an attractive uniform (see photo) and also that a House System operates for sporting and academic purposes.

There is mention, too, of various Reading Laboratories having been introduced. (There was earlier mention of these). They consist of numerous stories on cards (see illustration), carefully graded by difficulty and colour-coded. If used thoroughly the pupil is able to self-correct and plot his/her progress on a graph. One such Reading Laboratory was in use at the school in 2011.



There is mention, too, of suitable use being made of the “new Mathematics texts.” Singing and music gained special praise:

*“In the field of Music, the staff have achieved a good deal of success. Quite a number of children are taught music; some are being trained as organists. A school orchestra has been formed and performs quite creditably. The school choir sings extremely well. Verse speaking is well done and drama is thoroughly enjoyed. The*

*work of the school in these areas is most commendable.”*

A school orchestra, no less!! In his general Remarks at the conclusion of his report the inspector mentions that “Bible, Health and Temperance lessons are taken regularly.” Once before there was mention of Temperance! The Parents and Friends Association is mentioned as being active and helpful, and that audio-visual equipment is being used regularly. There is also mention that a group of school athletes visited Weipa for a competition.

### Stories from 1971

A letter clearly marked “Convent of Mercy, Thursday Island 4875. 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1971” gives us an insight into some of the activities of the Sisters in that year: Recreational holiday on Hammond Island; visit to Bamaga to become familiarised with the Catholic folk there; flight to Daru; visits to Horn Island; working bee with reaping hooks on Hammond Island to assist in repair of damage from heavy rains; inter-house sports on Hammond in spite of the usual transport being stuck on a rock.

<sup>13</sup> 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> September, 1969



And presumably all the time, catechism, tables, spelling, composition, poetry, singing, sewing, homework etc.

And Sister ends her letter thanking many for their help:

*"A sincere thank you to all our mainland supporters, to those who supply prayer power or news contact or sales representation or special little tit-bits with travelers in our direction. God bless you all."*

More insights into life in 1971 are found in the pages of the *Torres News* of that year. There were the traditional sports on Hammond Island; a visit to a touring Puppet Show; another sports excursion to Weipa; talk in the town of the provision of a swimming pool and the traditional Fete in October.

An innovation was the Evening Study Programme. It is so interesting and innovative that the report in the *Torres News* of October 26th deserves reproduction in full.

An insight into changes in the Catholic Church is found in the short report that *"The first Guitar Mass in the OLSH church was heard last Sunday with guitarists Warren Hastings and Keith Thompson."*<sup>14</sup>

## Glimpse of 1972

Blessing and opening of the Church at Bamaga amazed Sister writing in 1972:

*"The building was originally a wartime Mess at Red Island Point. Father purchased the building and had it removed to Bamaga. Great credit is due to the local people for the work they put into making it such a fitting dwelling for the Lord. After the opening, the Bishop said Mass and confirmed and gave First Holy Communion to the children. Over six hundred people attended the ceremonies. We marvelled at the organisation and co-operation amongst the different tribes in preparing the lavish feast to celebrate. It takes some planning to cater for six hundred people."*



*celebrations continue all day and part of the night. ... by now we are well accustomed to slipping into slumber because or in spite of the wild chanting and drum-beating."*

**STUDY PERIOD**

It's just past 7 o'clock at night and the group of teenage boys sit quietly listening to the news. After the news they take part in the discussion concerning the world events that they have been listening to. A teacher is there to lead the discussion and provide background information. At 7.30 most of the topics have been discussed and the boys have enjoyed this chance of talking about happenings outside Thursday Island.

They are now ready for their study period of half-an-hour which will be followed by a ten minute break for a cup of tea and some biscuits.

What's next?! Well at approximately 8.15 last Monday night one group of the boys were introduced to the Mother General of the Sisters of Mercy, another group to Mr. Brian Perkins, National Bank Manager, and the third group met Mr. Warika Adidi, Councillor at Tamwoy Town. Mother Claver, Mr. Perkins and Mr. Adidi were invited to talk to the boys and these talks were thoroughly enjoyed. The previous Monday night at 8.15 the boys had discussed meeting procedure - one day some of them would be members of the Church or Island Councils. The week earlier they had written letters to relatives on their home Islands.

At 9 o'clock the boys are ready for bed after having spent an interesting two hours and the teachers are transported back to their homes by a Department of Aboriginal & Island Affairs vehicle.

The programme of study outlined above is a result of discussions held between Mr. Yarrow, Manager of the D.A.I.A., Father McSweeney, Mr. Scott, and Sisters and Teachers of the three Thursday Island Schools. Until recently the Sisters and Teachers had supervised a two hour study period and this had proved to be quite successful but it was felt that a different type of programme could be organised to allow greater participation by the boys.

The present programme has only been in operation for a month but all concerned are very happy with it. Mr. Yarrow has stated his appreciation of the efforts of the teachers concerned in their work with the boys at the Torres Strait College.

And something a bit radical for Catholics in 1972 was joining in procession celebrating the *Coming of the Light*, a peculiarly Protestant commemoration:

*"As I write the sound of distant drums can be heard as the Torres Strait Islanders are celebrating the 101<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the first [Protestant] missionaries here. This morning we had a joint procession down the street ...*

<sup>14</sup> *Torres News*, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1971



In September, 1972, Sister writes about the “season of feasts, fetes and fires.” She begins by referring to some unfavourable articles of Thursday Island that have appeared in the press down south in the past weeks. But the main news is “turning the first sod” for the new building. Some excellent photos were taken of the event.



*“A grand ceremony marked the opening of the Third Term. Swinging a pick in the manner of an expert, Sister turned the first sod for the building of the new school. Clergy, headmasters from the Primary and Secondary schools, the D.A.I.A. [Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs] representatives, the Town Clerk, the president of the P&F, and other interested spectators made an impressive audience for this womanly feat. Thus far, steel posts have been set in the many foundation holes and the unwary have used the vacant holes to mime at being posts.”*

And happily the new “kitchen complex” was completed and a surprise afternoon tea was thrown by the Catholic ladies who also brought along “useful gifts of kitchen-ware.” It is quite possible at the time of writing (2011) when the Marist Brothers were in residence at the old convent and the inheritors of this new kitchen complex, that some of that original gift of kitchenware may still be extant. There was at that stage such a miscellany of crockery and cutlery, that some, surely, had survived from 1972.

### School Inspection, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1972

Inspector L.C. Thompson opened his Report with the remark, *“The Sister-in-Charge [Sister Margaret] is firm and efficient in the discharge of her duties.”* He continued:

*“The staff members are loyal and diligent and all strive to provide a climate in which understanding, trust and happiness can develop. The children come to school neatly dressed and are pleasantly responsive. A wide range of abilities is readily noticeable in the groups. To accommodate the achievement levels, the Sister-in-Charge has been carefully selective in purchasing aids to establish an interesting activities area to encourage self enrichment. It was a particular interest to note the enthusiasm of many of the children working in this area.”*

Harking back to 1911 when a similar observation was made in a general report on education in the Torres Strait, the following comment is read: *“It is suggested that Teacher composed stories including familiar local content, could be used as the basis for teaching additional skills and consolidating those previously introduced.”*

Other remarks note good word recognition but poor comprehension of meaning; encouragement to expand the Science program in terms of environmental study; but that the singing heard was *“sweet and pleasantly restrained,”* and that a most colourful range and variety of Art work and Crafts was seen.

Final judgement: “CONDITION: VERY FAIR – GOOD”

In 1972 there were four teaching Sisters and one Teacher’s Aide on the staff.

## 1973 and the “New School”

The following is a facsimile of Sister Margaret’s letter dated Palm Sunday, 1973:

School reopened with an enrolment of 125! The usual animation that accompanies the first day back at school was not lacking here. Everyone apparently was glad to be back. However by now the keenness has somewhat blunted. Absentism is quite prevalent, unfortunately.

Our new school will be completed by late June!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
At the moment we must endure the rare harmony created by hammers, saws and the cement mixer. It is evident daily that the new school is a must. Each day something gives way.. one more step less or one floorboard less. We are trusting that it will see us through till July. The new school has four classrooms, library, Staff room, store room and tuckshop.

Another interesting development is mentioned in this letter. There began an arrangement of some Sisters going over to Hammond Island each Thursday night to organise “study”.

There is also mention of some anxiety concerning the prospect of the northern-most Torres Strait islands becoming part of Papua New Guinea. This will be developed a little in the chapter on Thursday Island in the 1970s.

A very progressive development is mentioned in a letter of Fr. Miah McSweeney to Bishop Torpie<sup>15</sup>:

*“The P.&F had a very good year last year and are going to put a closed circuit video tape television into the new school. We have had a fair bit of communication with the media section of the Education Department and they have been most cooperative. I think this will give a tremendous advantage to the children here.”*



Then the big day for the opening of the new school, and the frantic preparations to be ready<sup>16</sup>:

*“July 28<sup>th</sup> [1973] was scheduled as the opening date for our school and as the day approached the atmosphere buoyed with excitement. Months of hard work had gone into accomplishing this feat. ... much worry for Father and the builder as boats came and went, either bringing or bringing no building materials or the wrong stuff. Many complications set in. The power wasn’t strong enough to work the sander – the welder wouldn’t work – floor-stain didn’t arrive – some nocturnal visitor went off with a tin of the verandah floor paint – the door hinges were too big – no locks for the doors – louvers unbaked and had to be painted.”*

Father McSweeney adds some further last-minute difficulties:

*“The school is still proceeding and we will probably still be hammering and concreting and painting until the last minute. I will put [visiting priests] Galwey and O’Grady to work as soon as they arrive. In spite of the crises of the last 24 hours – David Boyd fell through the ceiling of the tuck shop, our welder blew a pole fuse last night and we didn’t have any power, infected blisters on some people’s hands and a fear that we will run out of materials, we expect to be reasonably presentable by July 28<sup>th</sup>.”*

No wonder Gwen Moloney at the Torres News<sup>17</sup> noticed:

*“Father McSweeney wearing a worried look these days as he hurries to get the new school in order for the Grand Opening on Saturday. It’s amazing the amount of visitors he’s managed to get to lend a hand, if you ever see Rod Delaforce ask him how he likes shovelling cement.”*

<sup>15</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1973.

<sup>16</sup> Return to Sister’s letter, partly quoted earlier.

<sup>17</sup> July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1973.





And Sister finally gets to tell the story of the actual Opening:

*"However it was finished 'enough' to be blessed and officially opened on July 28<sup>th</sup> [1973]. The islanders from Hammond decorated the school and grounds in typical island fashion and the T.I. people did the catering. There were a few minor panics but on the whole the evening went off .. successfully. We were very happy to have Mother General with us. The Bishop of Daru came down with one of his priests and two of the de Monfort Sisters. Bishop Torpie blessed the building. Then the Premier officially*

*opened it. "This Day To-night" gave it a T.V. coverage ... Father McSweeny had a video-tape recording done of it which was shown that afternoon. One of the classrooms was set up as a History Room and many interesting pictures of the early days on T.I. were displayed."*

Years later Father<sup>18</sup> Miah McSweeny recalled words that the Premier, Joh Bjelke-Peterson, had spoken on the occasion. He said: *"I pray that this school will be a blessing on all those who attend it; and that they will be a blessing on all those they meet."* And one of the Sisters recalls that the Premier asked if he could use a phone, and he was taken to Sister Superior's rooms to use the bedside phone; and upon sitting on the bed to make the call the bed collapsed under him. Fr. McSweeny also advised the Premier that if he saw a sign saying "WET PAINT", it meant it!

It might be thought that all would be wonderful now in the new school following the continuous disruption and noise of the construction. But this was T.I., and not all building projects are smooth sailing. Another facsimile from Sister's letter of October, 1973, three months after the opening, will vividly recall a sense of frustration:



(Photos show Premier Johannes Bjelke-Petersen opening the building, and group of children as part of the audience.)



Stoicism and hope! So when the foundation plaque (see illustration) is read it should be remembered that settling in to schoolwork the following day (or week, or month) was anything but smooth and straightforward!

However school *did* resume and there was obviously enough energy left in Third Term<sup>19</sup> for an excursion to Weipa with 30 children from the schools of the area, picking up some from Bamaga on the way.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Brother Barry Lamb, August, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Sister Margaret's letter, October, 1973.



## School in 1974

There is *still* mention in 1974 of the new school not being finished or properly furnished:

*"School reopened a week late as Teachers were unable to return owing to the floods down south. The usual animation that accompanies the first day back at school was not lacking here. One hundred and thirty-five descending on you is rather a shock to the system but gradually we synchronised producing wonders academically or academic-wonders. 'Tis heavenly to be in the new school and it will be absolutely marvellous when it is completely finished and furnished. The old school<sup>20</sup>, somewhat like the wreck of the Hesperus stands – buffeted by the wind and rain and flanked by a reef of dense green growth, which conceals the old timber, roof etc from its top storey. Every Saturday the Fathers had a working bee and by now the place is clean and tidy."*<sup>21</sup>



School reopened with two teachers in the new school and three in the old building. No timber had arrived to finish the new one and no iron to start work on the old one. Some of the furniture couldn't be brought into the new school because it was riddled with white ants and the new furniture hadn't arrived. At the moment we are all in the new place.. still no furniture.. the old place is being demolished so the two main entrances to the new school have been closed off and the toilet and drinking area are out of bounds too. The grounds are just in a MES However one day ... all will be organised!!!!

(Photo shows Father Miah McSweeney on his motorbike)

Visitors during 1974 included Sister Brigid from Adelaide, the British Consul General, and Sister Monica Duffy. And another appreciated visitor was Mr. Rainer Friedhoff from the North Queensland Conservatorium of Music, who, with great patience, tensed T.I.'s "aching pianos" back to concert pitch.

A booklet, "SCHOOL POLICY AND AIMS"<sup>22</sup>, is produced which covers all aspects of functional procedures for the guidance of teachers.<sup>23</sup>

The section of Inspector Seary's 1974 Report headed "ADMINISTRATION" is so complimentary that it deserves recording as a tribute to the Sisters (Sisters M. Matthew (Margaret), Paul, Cecilia and Rovenia) and their assistant Teacher-Aide (Miss Gracie Kebisu):

*"Pleasing high levels of self discipline and Pupil involvement in the educative process were evident during the Inspection. The Principal [Sister Margaret Rush] gives purpose, direction and support, to all the school activities and receives the willing co-operation of her staff. Teacher/Pupil relationships are very good in all Grades and the Pupils reward the professional competence and personal interest of their teachers, with respect and genuine affection. The tone of the school is very good and I was impressed with the developing levels of Pupil competence in – social graces, manners and the ability to communicate. An active Parents and Citizens Association reflects community support for the school, and the high regard in which the school is held by Pupils and Parents alike."*

<sup>20</sup> Is this the old orphanage or the "Hall" at street level?

<sup>21</sup> Sister Margaret's letter, April 9, 1974.

<sup>22</sup> Wouldn't it be great to find a copy of this booklet!

<sup>23</sup> Inspector T. Seary in his Report dated 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> October, 1974.



In 1974 is the first mention of Parent/Teacher interviews, and the Principal reports a good level of response on the part of the parents. There is also mention of, *“a pleasing synthesis of Conventional and Modern methods”* in teaching. The racial composition of the children is given: 20% white children, 20% of children of mixed origin and 60% of children of Island extraction with a few aborigines. And the integration of all groups is noted: *“Within the school the integration of all groups is very good, and there is a high level of communication and participation in school affairs, from all sections of the varied Pupil groupings.”*

Some interesting developments appear under the heading, INNOVATIONS:

- “(a) the use of Movie Camera and Video Tape, to record achievement levels in Drama, Lecturette etc.; and to allow analysis of results and diagnosis of faults.*
- (b) the foundation of a School Library with suitable reference material [though the library had been established many years previously].*
- (c) the introduction of Objective Tests of Reading Ability.*
- (d) the introduction of night classes for backward children.*
- (e) the integration of a Reading Exercise with Vocal Music.”*

The Inspector’s congratulatory final summation (1974) is worthy of recording in full:

*“Within this smoothly operating school, Pupil satisfaction with personal development in the acquisition of social graces, development of communication Skills and achievement in academic area, was very obvious during the Inspection.*

*“Equally obvious was the growth of school pride, rising levels of self-discipline, and Pupil participation in the educative process. While the new school building, with its modern amenities, has contributed to this development, of more importance, was the contribution of personal Teacher interest, professional competence and standards set for Pupil achievement levels. That the Pupils have accepted the challenge of high standards set by their Teachers was very apparent during the inspection. The Principal, Staff Teachers and very capable Teacher Aide are to be commended on the high standards the Pupils have attained in the religious, academic, physical and cultural fields, and for the high regard in which they are held by their appreciative Pupils.”*

### Further matters during 1974

At the start of the year Sister Rose and Sister Cecilia arrived to join Sisters Matthew and Paul, and Father John Newman came to take over from Father Hilary Flynn.

The year started haltingly with a delay caused by floods on the mainland. A number of students who finished primary school in 1973 were reported as having headed south to continue their schooling. Otherwise the regular things took place: various P&F fundraising ventures; Crowning of Our Lady’s statue in May; Interschool sports in July with OLSH taking out the marching trophy; Communion and Confirmation in July; Puppeteers Sally and David Poulton presenting *Peter Pan* “for the children of T.I.” and in October a presentation, “Ballet for Fun” was presented for 800 T.I. children in the Town Hall.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Details gleaned from the pages of the *Torres News* of 1974.





## CHAPTER 27

### Thursday Island in the 1970s and 1980s

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The flight of Torres Strait Islanders from the Torres Strait generally to the mainland of Australia continued during the 1970s and 1980s, and those leaving Thursday Island in the same way were no exception. This trend began before the Second World War. A university thesis was written on the emigration of Torres Strait people to Cairns before WW II.<sup>1</sup>

One feature of the story of Thursday Island in these decades is the desire of many to seek a “better” life elsewhere.

Finch, writing in 1977 under the chapter heading “Islanders of Tomorrow”, puts it this way:<sup>2</sup>

*“Although people have lived on the islands of the Torres Strait for many hundreds of years, it has taken only some twenty years (since government approval was given for the people to leave the Islands and live and work elsewhere) for the population to be halved. What can be the future of a group of islands when its people, in increasing numbers, voluntarily and successfully find greater opportunities for themselves and their children outside their homeland?”*

*“Among a number of those Islanders who have left and among those who have elected to remain in their island homes, there is still a strong hope that future developments in the Torres Strait will halt the emigration and, perhaps, even attract the people to return. Islander and D.A.I.A. efforts to promote new industries, create greater job opportunities, provide housing and develop educational facilities, together with increased Commonwealth assistance in the area, are proving successful.*

*“For a number of people, though, particularly the younger generation, there is a desire not only for increased opportunities on the Islands but also for a more rapid access to some of the advantages of modern society, such as unrestricted movement, improved wages and associated material benefits. At the same time, for many Islanders, both young and old, there has been in recent years an upsurge in the importance of Islander identity – a renewed interest in their cultural traditions, values and other aspects of the Islanders’ unique and rich heritage. How the future progress and changes in Island life takes account of these various interests and hopes will be a decision for the Island people themselves.”*

### Entertainments

“Thursday Island Nurse”, Elizabeth Burchill,<sup>3</sup> tells of recreations on T.I. in her time.

*“T.I. lacked the organised sport of cities but we exercised by swimming, day or night, at Hospital Point in the shark-proof pool or playing tennis on the town courts at the other end of the island. We fished off the wharf and went boating at weekends. ... Thursday Islanders fill their nights with laughter, music, singing and dancing. Hospital nursing aides when off duty would invariably dance. Flower-decked hair, thudding bare feet, and swinging bodies move rhythmically to the sound of guitars, drums and handclapping. They sang the haunting melodies of their forebears years ago but now many have chosen the mainland pop tunes and use electric guitars for accompaniment.”*

### “Carefree way of life”<sup>4</sup>

Writing in 1982, Captain John Foley assesses the mood and atmosphere of life on Thursday Island this way:

*“T.I.s lifestyle, like any other, is an unavoidable byproduct of the island’s history and the hotchpotch of humanity which makes up the populace. Torres Strait Islanders, Aborigines, Europeans, Papuans, Indians, Sri Lankans, Malays, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and others, plus a kaleidoscope of mixtures in between, all live here together quite happily. The atmosphere is tropical, a languidly individualistic carefree way of life that is amusing, sometimes frustrating, but always relaxing. Perhaps inevitably, some less desirable aspects of mainland culture have spread to this island community – particularly beer drinking, which is keenly pursued and maintains the viability of the town’s four hotels. The native name for T.I. is Waiben, reputed (and sometimes disputed) to mean dry place, could have something to do with it.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Finch, Noel, *The Torres Strait Islands*, Jacaranda Press, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> P.73.

<sup>3</sup> Burchill, Elizabeth, *Thursday Island Nurse*, Rigby, 1971, pp60-1.

<sup>4</sup> Foley, *Timeless Isle*, p.3

A comment is made by Bob Raymond, writing in the mid 1980s<sup>5</sup>, suggests that any lawlessness, hardliving or adventure of earlier times had completely disappeared by his time of his writing:

*"A visitor today [mid 1980s] will not find a great deal (apart from the cemetery) to help conjure up the past. There are few ships in the harbor, but the occasional lugger, crewed by shadowy figures who seem reluctant to come on deck, still slips unobtrusively away at dusk for some unstated destination. The population is still the most racially intermingled of any community in Australia, but the melting pot has simmered down. Most tensions now seem to be released on the football field, and the remaining hotels seem, most days, as quiet as the churches."*

## Population

*"The population [1971]<sup>6</sup> of approximately 2,500 consists mostly of Islanders, Malaysians and those of mixed blood. About 400 white people are residents engaged in commerce or government activities."*

A Supplementary Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee formed to make a study of T.I. under point 2.30, Summary of Population Trends, states: *"It would appear that if past influences prevail, the population will remain stable at a figure between 2000 and 2500"*<sup>7</sup> And later: *"1971 Census figures indicate that since 1954, the population has varied between 2000 and 2600, the present population being 2350."*<sup>8</sup>

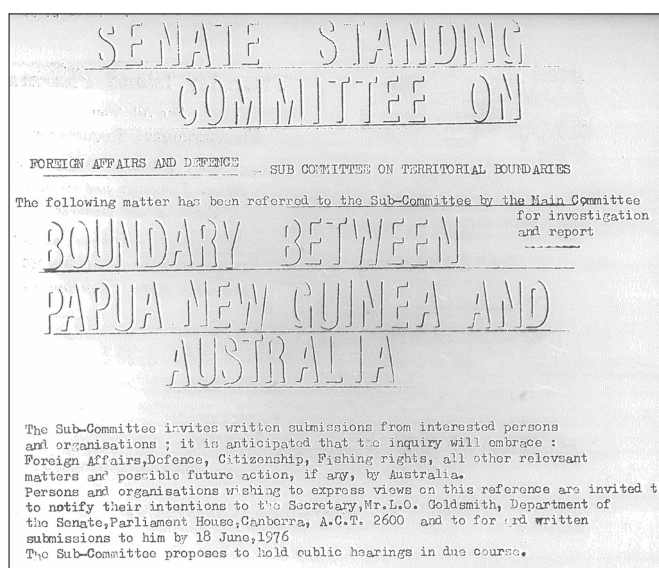
## Annexation of islands by Papua New Guinea?

*"In 1977 a cloud of uncertainty spread over Torres Strait. There was justifiable concern that a proposed seabed boundary designed to give newly independent Papua New Guinea a greater share of the Strait's resources might lead to a loss of the northern islands of Saibai, Boigu and Dauan. ... [As it turned out] The three islands remain part of Queensland."*<sup>9</sup>

Prior to this, Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen had visited Thursday Island in 1973 to consult the residents on this matter of the annexation of certain islands to the soon-to-be independent new nation of Papua New Guinea. *"The Torres Strait will remain a part of Queensland and Australia,"* the Premier told the Torres News.<sup>10</sup> He went on to tell of his consultations during a tour of the outer islands and reported:

*"Not once did any islander come forward to say that he agreed with the intention of the Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, to give their homes away to Papua New Guinea." ... "He said he would continue to oppose any border change while the islanders wished him to."*

Then in 1976 any interested party was invited to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on the Boundary Between Papua New Guinea and Australia.<sup>11</sup>



## Growing community integration

After the Second World War a number of enormous changes took place. One was the building of Tamwoy and the settlement of many Islander families on the island. Another was approaching equal pay for all and the growing role and acceptance of women in all aspects of society. Drinking laws allowed all to drink alcohol in public houses on an equal basis. And as Thursday Island moves into the 1970s there is greater willingness for

<sup>5</sup> Dutton, G. Gen Ed., *The Book of Australian Islands*. Chapter 1 by Bob Maynard, p.10.

<sup>6</sup> Burchill, p.70, caption for photo.

<sup>7</sup> P.7.

<sup>8</sup> P.15

<sup>9</sup> *Timeless Isle*, p.72

<sup>10</sup> *Torres News*, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1973

<sup>11</sup> Facsimile from *ibid.*, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1976.



all races to socialise with one another. Ina Titasey in her reflections on this period notes that it is during the 1970s that people of any race more readily went to one another's parties.

*"Being an Islander in the 1980s"* is a sub-heading in Jeremy Beckett's book, *Torres Strait Islanders: Custom and Colonialism* (1987).<sup>12</sup> Referring to the 1980s he writes: *"Thursday Island has increasingly become a meeting ground as the old social and legal barriers have fallen."*

## Employment

Beckett<sup>13</sup> refers also to Islander employment in the 1980s: "Membership of the regular workforce, which is the experience of most able-bodied males on the mainland (though of few females), is also for them a significant way of taking part in Australian society. It is a daily reminder that they have emerged from colonial conditions to enjoy all the rights of other Australian workers.

## Acceptance of Islander culture

Wearing a *lava lava* when being presented to the Queen or in negotiations with government would have been unthinkable in earlier times. But Beckett quotes examples of such as showing a developing feeling of being comfortable with being an Islander vis-a-vis the wider Australian society.<sup>14</sup> He continues:

*"Island dancing, like that of Australia's various ethnic communities, has found a ready acceptance with other Australians. Not only is it welcomed at multicultural and civic festivals, but schools are ready to pay for troupes to give demonstrations. ... island dance is now the principal way in which urban Islanders present themselves to their fellow citizens."*

## "Greatly improved"

Sister M. Claver returned to T.I. in 1984, having taught in the 1960s, and she was able to compare T.I. then and in 1984. She made the following observations:<sup>15</sup>

*"The island has greatly improved since 1942 or even 1960 days. ... The government has improved the Housing situation. All now have decent looking homes and most have flower gardens. Of course the European population have quite lovely tropical homes. There is a big dam which is being extended. ..."*

## Rubbish

A very strongly worded letter published in the *Torres News* of November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1973, (reproduced in box) told with disgust of filth littered across the island. Peter Dunne, returning in 1976 after 56 years away, felt urged to write a long letter to the *Torres News* on the same theme. His criticism ended with another theme noticed throughout the years: the idea that T.I. might become a tourist resort.

So far as T.I. is concerned, there was cause for my disillusionment in that the town had deteriorated, in regard to cleanliness and tidiness, and in the seeming lack of action by the Council to improve the situation. In no other town do I remember ever seeing in the gutters, streets and under buildings such a collection of discarded tins, bottles and other rubbish. Also, there are quantities of dead grass, weeds and other undergrowth which could be set alight and cause destructive fires; it needs only a carelessly thrown match or cigarette butt to start a fire. Whether this work is not undertaken owing to lack of funds or inability to cope I don't know, but at least some attempt should be made to instil in the inhabitants a desire for maintaining a clean town. Cleanliness and beauty attract tourists, and who is to say that T.I. cannot become a tourist resort? It is in the centre of a group of attractive islands suitable to the tourist trade.

## Mentions of independence

From time to time different ones on Thursday Island and the other islands of the Torres Strait suggest that The Torres Strait might become an independent nation! There were letters along these lines in the *Torres News* in 1979 (February 20th) and 1988 (January). It is a theme that pops up occasionally and different forms of autonomy or independence are canvassed. Thirty years after these mentions in the 1970s and 1980s the idea was still occasionally being raised.

<sup>12</sup> Beckett, Jeremy, *Torres Strait Islanders: Custom and Colonialism*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1987, p.206.

<sup>13</sup> P.207.

<sup>14</sup> P.208.

<sup>15</sup> Letter dated 3rd Nov., 1984, addressed to Dear Sister Patricia Walsh and Community. The letter is held in the archives of the Sisters in Kensington, N.S.W.

## Thursday Island in 1982

Captain John Foley was obviously very familiar personally with life on T.I. and in love with the island and its people. Let us hear from him<sup>16</sup> what life was like in 1982 and what hopes he held for the future:

And so to the present. One of the more common, and certainly accurate, remarks made about T.I. is that it never changes. It is, to use the old cliché, an island where time stands still. Crises come and go, occasionally an old building is pulled down (or burned down) and replaced by a new one, but by and large the island is much the same now as it was 50 years ago. In many ways progress has either passed the island by or failed to reach it. Or just may be the people who live here prefer things the way they are.

Entertainment among the old and young alike has always been very much a do-it-yourself affair. But in 1979 modern communications technology brought to Torres Strait a local radio station—and in late 1981 the people of this area were able to enjoy television, watching the same A.B.C. programs as Sydneysiders (and at the same instant), thanks to the satellite-fed Remote Area Television Service operated by O.T.C. It remains to be seen how T.I.'s traditional evening activities will be affected by home television.

T.I. people are very active socially, they make an effort to get involved in the many and diverse clubs and associations which flourish here. Naturally enough, they are great outdoor types and whenever possible take advantage of this superb location and splendid weather. On weekends, "Black Beach" is a hive of activity as boats laden with Eskys, fishing tackle and excited children are manoeuvred into the water and families speed off to their favourite camping or fishing spot. They have dozens of idyllic places to choose from.

There develops a strange, indefinable bond between the people who live here and the island itself. Not pride perhaps, nor even true affection; more a nostalgia, a certain satisfaction from having been associated with it and its unique historical background. Seamen experience similar ties to old ships—it is always the slow, mishap-prone rust bucket they recall with attachment, rarely the sleek, fast liner. And, again like old shipmates, former T.I. residents, whenever and wherever they meet, soon turn their conversation to their common bond—T.I., their friends there, and a desire to return.

And what of the future? It's hard to say. A new pearl-shell or beche-de-mer boom is quite possible. Is there oil under the sea here? More gold to be found? Who knows? Whatever does happen economically is not likely to change the languid casualness of the population. Past history has demonstrated clearly that T.I. itself will alter only slowly, if at all. And whatever the island's destiny, the lure of the wongai is certain to continue—visitors and former residents alike will return again and again, drawn by an invisible magnet, to relive and relish the unique tropical mixture of the exotic that is Thursday Island.

## End of the open-air theatre

It was in early 1988 that the open-air theatre finally closed its doors -- or had they had any, rung down the curtain -- for the last time.<sup>17</sup> The great classic movies of the 1950s and 1960s had all been shown there along with many "B-grade" movies. Twenty-first century readers may be surprised to learn that it was the custom in those days for TWO movies to be presented for the one ticket, with an "interval" in between.

The theatre had its "dark" side also. The segregation of seating within the theatre reflected the attitudes of the time. The upper level with the soft seats were reserved for the white population and some patrons of other ethnic origins, while "coloured" patrons were restricted to the hard benches on the lower level. Though these divisions had ended before the cessation of the theatre itself, its disappearance as a feature of T.I. society may also be seen as a symbol of the growing integration of the whole community.

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<sup>16</sup> *Timeless Isle*, pages 72 and also 74.

<sup>17</sup> *Torres News*, March 18<sup>th</sup>.

## CHAPTER 28

### School developments, 1975-1987

#### Passion Story enactment

It became the custom to have the children prepare and present a re-enactment of the Passion during Holy Week. Sister Patricia Butterfield recalled it thus<sup>1</sup>:

*“Every year we had an enactment of the Passion Story. Each class, sometimes combined classes, were allocated different parts: Palm Sunday, the Last Supper etc. We began with the Palm Sunday Performance on the top field with four unknown actors, covered with sheets, bending down on their hands, carried the Lord on their backs. As they moved forward the other children waved palm branches and sang appropriate hymns. In the enactment of the Crucifixion Scene, the soldiers seemed to assume an air of great importance as they stood to attention, motionless, their faces painted, displaying their plumed headdresses with swords and breastplates of different colours, all of which were made at previous Art classes. The final scene took place outside the Hall.”*

#### Annual Fete

Besides the preparation for the Sacraments, the learning of prayers and hymns, the excellent academic work and nurturing of personal confidence and competence amongst the pupils, there was the annual Fete to look forward to. Known as the Catholic Mission Fete, the proceeds were shared, according to need, between the School and the Parish in Fr. McSweeney’s time.<sup>2</sup>

It was the equivalent to T.I. having a Show! Sister Rovenia reminisced in 2011 about the Fete:

*“Working all year to prepare for the Mission Fete held in October was part of living on Thursday Island. All groups, both religious, ethnic, Catholic and non Catholic contributed to make the Catholic Fete seem like a mini Show.”*



Father Miah McSweeney likewise recalled how “huge” the Catholic Fete was. He remembered how the beginning of the Fete would be signalled by the arrival of the “Turtle Truck”, which immediately did a roaring, but brief, trade. Cut up Turtle meat, cooked in the ground earlier that day, he recalled, was displayed on the back of the truck and sold quickly. An essential aspect of every Catholic Fete, the “Chocolate Wheel”, was a prominent feature of the event.

Because of the many visitors for the Centenary celebrations of October, 1984, the Fete of that year, which coincided with the celebrations, was packed. To give an idea of the crowd and the atmosphere let us read from a letter from former teacher, Sister M. Claver, invited back for the celebrations:

*“At 5.00p.m. we had some sandwiches then joined the already big crowd at the fete. The Sisters had stalls in the Hall, that used to be the school till the sixties, when the “orphanage” was pulled down and a lovely school built in its place. Then there were stalls on the verandah and on both sides of the playground right over to where what was originally Sr. M. Urban’s Infants’ school-room. I bought some items for the Sisters back home, tried my*

<sup>1</sup> Recalled in a Memoir prepared for Brother Barry in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. McSweeney reminisced with Brother Barry in 2011.



*luck on various "lucky" stalls and eventually after paying 20c for a ticket I won 20c! They had about a dozen or more raffles, so I bought tickets in everything, including a bicycle! They made \$20,000 clear. They usually make 16 to 18 thousand dollars. The crowd had been immense. Once one got into the Hall it was hard to move around or to get out again. On the grounds it was just the same. One could hardly get from A to B."*

## School, 1976 to 1980

Insights are gained into school life and procedures through the Inspectors' Reports for 1976, 1979 and 1980. Inspector T. Seary, in September, 1976, summed up his visit with the three words: "GOOD AND PROMISING." He repeats his observations of earlier visits that the children enjoy their school environment and that personal communication and teacher/pupil relationships and the tone of the school were very pleasant. Reading was said to be good with a pleasing percentage achieving above average. *"And the Pupils demonstrated both ability and willingness, to accept challenges in a variety of Subject Areas."*

*"A special feature of the school, is the opportunity which the commodious Library Complex, now offers for integration of various subject Areas and for extension of Cultural Activities. ... The school environment has been considerably improved since last inspection. the proportion of children from various ethnic groups remains substantially the same as noted in the previous Inspection Report. Social integration of all groups is very good and a pleasing aura of cohesion of effort in all aspects of school endeavour was obvious during the Inspection."*

Amongst "INNOVATIONS" noted were instruction in Native Dancing and emphasis on retention of Native Culture; the introduction of instrumental music and the introduction of individual Atlas and Dictionaries in Grades IV – VII.

By 1979 there has been an enormous increase in the school's population from 96 in 1976 to 151 in 1979<sup>3</sup>. In 1979 over 30 children are brought over to Sacred Heart School from Hammond Island each day. The background of the total roll of 151 consists of 94 of Islander descent, 42 of mixed race and 15 European children. To teach this large group of children there were four teaching Sisters and two Lay teachers.

There are remarks worthy of recording in the 1979 Report under the heading, Pupil Characteristics:

*"All children are friendly, courteous and well-behaved. It was a pleasure to visit the rooms and talk to the children. The courtesy and friendliness extend into the playground and the town in general. They welcome visitors and their happy disposition are always evident. All children were neatly dressed in neat and attractive school uniforms. They also respond very well to questioning. A feature of the school is the excellent attendance with only a few pupils giving trouble in this regard."*

The school is using the *Endeavour* scheme for reading, but, "The limited experience most children have of activities outside island life must be augmented by a concerted and controlled extension of "outside" knowledge to assist comprehension of reading material. A locally written play was being used in the upper grades. Various classes are still using the Cusenaire rods in mathematics. And the Grade One teacher gained special praise for *"a delightful morning session [that] included a variety of activities – Health, Safety, Cleanliness, Poetry, Songs, Stories, Religion etc."* And it was noted that during the latter part of 1979 there were plans for an excursion to cover Cairns, the Tablelands etc.

### SACRED HEART CONVENT SCHOOL

Even though raining, the break-up day last Friday was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended (some found it hard cramming that last piece of water melon into overfull tummies). An enjoyable play presented by Grades 4-5 under Sr. Columbiere's direction and the concert last Tuesday afternoon (the culmination of much practice and tuition by Sisters Elva, Sister Paul and the Hammond island dancing mothers) rounded off another successful year for the Sisters of Mercy. On behalf of the P.&F Assoc. I would like to thank all those who helped on Friday, at the Tuck Shop, (especially Pat Jones) and any other functions associated with the school throughout the year. Apologies to those who found the Recipe Book below par, (Hopes for a better one next year) The following typing errors have been noted since the Peto:- Joy Laifoo's Raised Doughnuts - 3/4 cup sugar should be 3/8 cup sugar. Marie Piggett's Mango Mousse "sprinkled with mango and rum, should be sprinkled with sugar and rum. Economical Icecream should include 1/2 cup sugar. Sec. P.&F.

The two inspectors conclude with the remarks: *"It was a pleasure to visit this school ... and all connected with the school are thanked for the kindness and courtesies extended during our visit."*

These kind remarks were addressed to Sisters M. Consilia, Paul, Elva and Joan Steele.

<sup>3</sup> Inspection 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1979, by J. Dwyer and L. Hughes.

Under the heading SACRED HEART CONVENT SCHOOL,<sup>4</sup> the reader may find a little insight into the school in 1976, the Sisters involved and some amusement in an apology regarding the typing of recipes into the school recipe book. The same issue of the *Torres News* mentions that Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser visited T.I. and met some school children.

A tiny insight into school life of the early 1980s is to learn that occasionally Father Miah McSweeney would drive the truck around the island to collect and bring to school students who had not arrived for the day's lessons.

## Grants

A feature of Australian schools from the mid 1970s onwards was applying for and being granted "Grants". In 1972 the Australian Labor Party won the Federal election and soon after, the new Prime Minister, Mr. Gough Whitlam, set in train the "Schools Commission" under the chairmanship of Prof. Peter Karmel. It was charged with investigating the needs of schools in Australia and recommending ways of attending to these needs. As time went by this mainly occurred in the form of "Grants". OLSH, T.I. school benefited time and again from such Schools Commission grants. This program continued when the government changed hands.

A letter of May, 1978, for instance, states: "*Dear Principal, I am pleased to advise that the Minister for Education has approved a grant of \$2,000 to your school for the purpose of purchasing library learning materials.*"

A letter telling of a more substantial grant on Minister for Education letterhead on 28<sup>th</sup> Feb., 1979, and signed by Minister John Carrick, announces:

*"Dear Sister Elva, I have much pleasure in informing you that I have approved the offer of a grant to your school for the following purpose:*

*Construction of general purpose learning area, verandah and covered area*

*The offer [is] of \$27,000 or 91% of the total cost of the approved project, ..."*

And in Sr. Elva's neat handwriting at the bottom of the page is the notation, "*Accepted 22.3.79.*"

The largesse of the Commonwealth Schools Commission continued into 1981 with a grant for \$40,000; and then in 1983 is a record of a grant of \$3,430 for library learning resources and \$640 for library furniture.

A quaint insight into this process of applying for grants is found at the end of a neatly typed page itemizing supplier of books, plus invoice number, plus cost, plus number of books. It reads: "*Thank God that's complete!*"

The reader in future decades should realize that many schools throughout Australia were receiving similar grants. And as will be seen, the process of applying for grants for diverse school projects continued to the end of the century and beyond. The above examples are merely indicators of the generous government support for schools during this period. This was irrespective of whichever political party was in government.

The Disadvantaged Schools Program was a similar source of grants. In 1979 there is \$560 for Equipment of Art and Craft Program and \$3,500 for "*Partial funding of an excursion to the Cairns District.*" And hard on the heels of such grants being approved during 1979 is a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1979, stating: "*This school wishes to apply for a Grant for 1980 Continuing Program for Disadvantaged Schools.*"



<sup>4</sup> *Torres News*, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1976.

The P&F Minutes of October, 1983, gives a review of that year's grants: Library and Learning, \$3,430 + audio-visual equipment; Furniture grant, \$640, Disadvantaged Schools, \$2,500. Then a note: *"Next year's Grants sought."*

### Recollections from early 1980s

Not every memory of school life is happy and not all children kind. Lola Lyons' recollections provide some insights into the lives of some children at this time which may astonish and sadden. Lola, her older sister, Jackie, and younger brother, Peter, were being raised on T.I. by their father who was often away doing building and construction work on outer islands. As a result Jackie, while still a school child, became the head of the household and carer for her sister, Lola, and brother, Peter. They lived together, with a caring eye from neighbours, but otherwise alone; three children alone in a house. The three came to school each day, and then attended to all the normal things in the afternoon/evening such as meals, laundry etc. Kindly neighbours, Lola remembers, who were ever watchful and supportive were the Wongs, Jimmy Stratton, Mary Moore and Ina Gela.

Being Papua New Guinea born, and appearing somewhat different, Lola remembers, somewhat bitterly, that she was bullied at school and often brought to tears. She was not seen to be of the same culture as the majority of the Islander children. She remarked, at one stage, in conversation with Brother Barry in 2011, that she was "picked on every day of my life." And worse than the pulling of hair etc. was the carrying of the hurt inside. The Sisters were aware of the children's situation of living on their own and Lola remembers affectionately how "Sister Mary Elva", as she called her, would look out for them. A small memory she has cherished for many years was being presented to Sister Elva and told to proudly recite the six-times tables, which she had recently mastered. She remembers Allister Croker as a special ally, also; so much so that when Lola decided to be baptised, Allister agreed to be her Godfather.

Then in about 1980, thanks to some string-pulling by Father Miah McSweeney, Jackie was given the opportunity to attend secondary school in Rockhampton, leaving Lola in charge of Peter to continue at school on their own. Lola pined for her absent sister.

Lola's father was able, from a distance, to pay for Lola to take piano lessons from Sister Paul. The payment for music lessons was a major source of income for the Sisters and it was remarked that the music tuition charge was actually greater than the school fees!

Tall and skinny, Lola was a champion runner, something her sister and brother shared with her. In spite of her being picked on by some of her peers she was, nevertheless, at one stage, House Captain of the McDermott House athletics team.

Lola has further insights into the walking-on-hands caper, called "circus" in Creole, remarked on elsewhere. She added that a particularly great achievement, like walking from the highest step behind the church down the several flights to street level, might earn the highest praise of: *"Custard Powder and Tomato Sauce!"*



### Hammond Island children as day pupils at Sacred Heart School

During most of this period a number of children from Hammond Island would come over each morning to T.I. and return after school. Sister Rovena Duffy recalls of the years 1980-1984:

*"Children travelled from Hammond Island and Horn Island to attend the Sacred Heart School on Thursday Island. The children from Hammond Island travelled by barge and arrived at the Hammond Island Landing at the back of Thursday Island. Often they were wet and walked over the hill to get to the school. The Sisters would change their clothes and dry the clothes they wore so they could change again in the afternoon ready for the return journey."*

Sister Marie recalls that it was nothing for a child to bring a squid that they had caught on the way to school



and ask Sister to look after it till going home time! And Sister Cheryl Fulton would sometimes find a child arrive at school soaking wet, books and all. On enquiring why, she might be told, “He be swimming.” He would have jumped overboard as the barge neared the shore to be able to beat the other children ashore.<sup>5</sup>

Not only were there the annual sports on Hammond Island but the invitation<sup>6</sup> to visitors promised:

*“Tea and coffee will be available, free, at Hammond Island at lunch time. This year [1987] Hammond Island Community will have on sale soft drink, chicken salad rolls, hot dogs, icy cups, damper, sop sop, coconut milk rice (poso) so that you will be able to purchase your lunch at the island if you wish to do so.”*

### 1977: T.I.s Centenary & success of Sacred Heart float

All of T.I. was in celebratory mood in July when the foundation of Thursday Island in 1877 was commemorated with lavish ceremonies and a dramatic re-enactment. The school archives hold a pencil sketch of the design for an ambitious float: the re-creation of the historic church on the back of a truck. And after enormous work by many hands the concept became a prize-winning reality! Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School took out the First Prize for the best float.



As can be seen in the pageant various children were dressed as the Priests and Sisters of the past.



(Photo of boys: Kevin Sabatino, Peter Laifoo, Henry Pearson, \_\_\_\_\_, Paul Garnier, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, Keith Fell, \_\_\_\_\_  
Photo of girls: Lola Lyons, \_\_\_\_\_, Lisa or Patty Lee, \_\_\_\_\_, Lency Dorante, Thecla Sabatino, Nolene Aston, Jackie Lyons)

(The photos of the winning float of 1977 and those of the children in costume, as well as many other photos of this period are from Pat Jones' collection.)

Notwithstanding the diversion of the lead-up to, and then the big Centenary celebrations of 1977 there was the regular round of teaching and preparation for the Sacraments every year as seen by the accompanying photos of First communicants from 1978. (The photos only show some of the children.)

<sup>5</sup> In conversation with Brother Barry in February, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Copy found in Presbytery archives.

(First communion boys: back row: Keith Fell, Sean Bruton; front row: Mario Sabatino, \_\_\_\_\_, Calvin Bruton)  
Other photo: at back: Donald Kirk?? Front: \_\_\_\_\_, Monica Bindoro, Veronica Bowie (or sister Maude)



### Honours for Father Miah McSweeney and Gwen Moloney

Both Father Miah McSweeney and Mrs. Gwen Moloney, both closely associated with OLSH school, were awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal during 1977.

### Financial arrangements for the Sisters in the Cairns Diocese

Readers may be surprised to learn from the recollections of Sister Rovena Duffy<sup>7</sup> that until the 1970s the Sisters were not paid, but earned what they had to live on from teaching music and "commercial" subjects. These subjects were taken before and after school and on Saturdays. School fees were collected from the children ... but then handed over to the Bishop. Only in the 1970s did Sr. Rovena remember the Sisters receiving a regular stipend after Father John Lennon had taken a prominent role in the finances of the Diocese. This became possible thanks to government part-payment of teachers in Catholic schools.



The Diocesan archives shed a little more light on these financial matters. In the Minutes of a Meeting of Principals et al. of 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1969, we read: "*In Cairns from 1970, the remuneration for Sisters teaching primary grades will be \$1000 per Sister per year.*"<sup>8</sup>

And in a letter of 29th April, 1971 Father John Lennon announces that the Bishop has approved, "*an interim increase of \$10 per month for each Religious Sister teaching in our Catholic Primary Schools.*"

By August, 1976 Father Lennon announces: "*As from 1 July 1976 the annual allowance for each Sister is to be increased by 10% from \$2,500 to \$2,750.*" And later, in June 1978, the whole agenda of a Meeting of Diocesan Directors and the Executive of the Conference of Major Superiors<sup>9</sup> is devoted to aspects of Religious stipends.

### Parents & Friends support, 1975- 1980

Constantly working in the background of schools throughout the world are those dedicated parents and friends who tirelessly raise funds for the smooth running of the schools, and, where possible, provide some extras. Sacred Heart School was specially blessed in this period with hard-working and imaginative folk who kept a keen eye on what was needed.

<sup>7</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry, 2011.

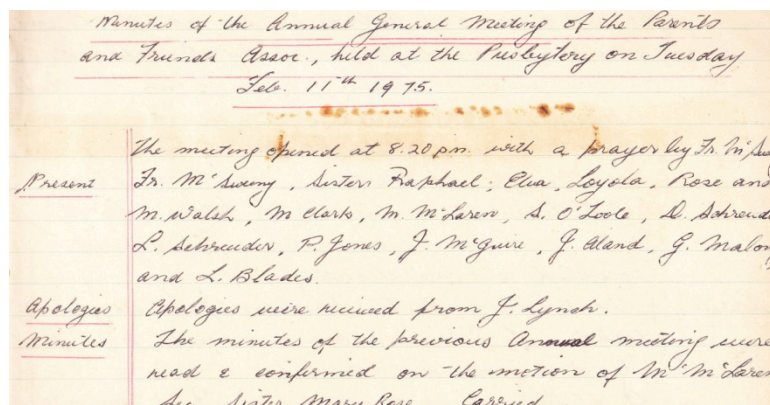
<sup>8</sup> A700, Box 4, folder 7.

<sup>9</sup> A700, Box 1, folder 10.



Presidents in this period were Max Walsh, Graham Stapleton, Tony Atkins and John Walker.

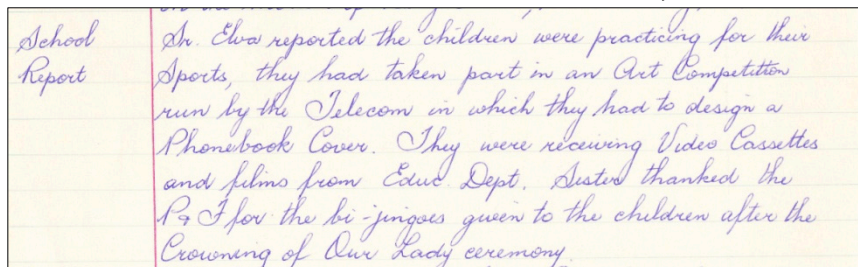
The cleaning of the toilets was a mundane matter that needed attention and efforts were made to find someone who would take on the role of Janitor. Initially it was the Sister Principal who would check and clean the toilets! The tuckshop was a problem, mainly because there were too few volunteers to attend to it. It did not operate daily and as a result, at one stage, there were 60 students who went downtown to buy their lunch. Various things were tried. And interestingly for those who know of the singer Seaman Dan, that he was engaged at one stage to take orders after 9.00am, then prepare the lunches to be ready for delivery after noon. As time went by there was the purchase of a pie heater for the tuckshop, then a refrigerator and also a deep freeze. When these played up there was always the P&F in the background to have them fixed or replaced.



An example of the thoughtfulness of the P&F in the late 1970s was the matter of mats for the High Jump. The school grounds, such as they are on T.I., are very hard and stoney. Landing after a high jump attempt was inviting injury. The thought was to fill large hessian bags with rubber off-cuts; so a rubber company was contacted on the mainland and eventually the rubber foam arrived. Now to prepare the bags. But at that stage someone donated some mattresses. So the next task was to cover the mattresses. And the rubber foam would not be wasted, but would be used for filling for cushions for the Fete. Eventually proper high-jump mats were purchased from grant money.

Flushing toilets were installed by John Clarke having received permission from the Town authorities to do so thanks to the early Sacred Heart Fathers and Brothers many years previously building large water tanks at the back and at the side of the church. This water was called on, also, to water the area at street level where the fete was to be in order to keep down the dust.

A most interesting fund-raising venture in this period was provision of gourmet meals in a restaurant-type setting in the School Hall for "KAMP OUT SAFARIS". This was at a time that hotels on T.I. did not offer meals in the middle of the day. This tourist group from the mainland were in search of a "lunch" for their clients on a Saturday during the season when visiting T.I. was part of their tour. Father Miah McSweeney saw the possibility of the ladies from the P&F becoming caterers and waitresses in the cause of the Parish and School. And so tables, table-cloths, cutlery and crockery were purchased and the modest Hall became a restaurant come Saturday. Various ones contributed the makings of the meal with some local hotels helping out. But because food and salads arrived from various kitchens, one of the P&F part-time waitresses in this venture



recalls her mild embarrassment if ever asked, "What's in the salad?"

(The facsimile in blue is to show the neat handwriting of Sr. Elva, Secretary to the P&F for some years.)

A Cake Stall was a common and very productive money-raising ploy. The stall was set up in the

main street of T.I. on a designated weekend and takings could be in the hundreds of dollars. Raffles in pubs were also occasional fund-raisers. The traditional "chook raffle" was not foreign to the Sacred Heart P&F; though usually it was chook plus wine plus cake. Sometimes the raffle was in association with the cake stall and sometimes a raffle was held in the *Torres Hotel* or in the *Grand*.



Along the way the P&F thought that they should have a Constitution. In February, 1984, Sister Rovena suggested they write to the State P&F body seeking a draft copy of a Constitution they might consider, and during May a special meeting was called to consider the draft and suggested modifications.

In spite of all the foregoing forms of raising money we still hear remarks such as (1985): *"It was agreed upon that we needed to do some fundraising in order to keep up with expenditures."*<sup>10</sup> And in 1986<sup>11</sup>: *"... as shown in the Financial Report we are greatly in need of funds."*

### Male teachers sought and other matters

The Minutes of the P&F Meeting of 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1982 include: *"Miss McDonald suggested the P&F write to Mr Jim Graham, C.E.O. Cairns, requesting male teachers replace Paul [Kennedy] and Robert [Noseda] in preference to female teachers. Both Paul and Robert have resigned after 12 months here and their services at Bingo will be missed."* The same Minutes tell of a custom: *"At the conclusion of Mass on Break-up day, all Grade Sevens would be presented with a memento of the school."*



In November, 1984, the school was allotted Tuesdays as their day to use the new Council Swimming Pool, and early in 1985 we learn of a Learn to Swim program being underway, and in April a Swimming Carnival was a 'splashing' success!

(Swimming photo is from 1985, from Doug Webb's album)



(Both photos are from 1984 and show Grade 3. One group with Sister Cheryl Fulton and the other with Vera Zappala.)

Sister Elva in her 'School Report' of 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1985 relates: *"Lessons in Island Dancing had begun. Songhie and Olive Pearson and Florence were training the children."* The observant reader would have noticed that this coincides with a remark by Jeremy Beckett in the previous chapter that the 1980s was a time when the learning and performing of Island dancing was "coming in". And in 1987<sup>12</sup> there is the mention: *"Mr. Jeliko Pearson has offered to teach students island dancing on some Fridays."*

(And, in passing, it might be noted that the Diocesan archives<sup>13</sup> records that in January 1988 Irene Batten introduces herself as the Diocesan Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Education Liaison Officer)

An inservice in Cairns on Process Writing and Language Programme that Sister Elva attended bore fruit with the announcement in early March, 1986, that, *"Children of all Grades [are] producing their own collection of*

<sup>10</sup> P&F Minutes, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> P&F Minutes, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> P&F Minutes, 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> A700, Box 1, folder 11.

*stories. An area has been set aside in the library to display these stories and any special work. Parents are invited to visit the area at any time.”*

In 1986 the special dramatisation of aspects of the Passion during Holy Week took a novel form: “*Grade seven children made a summary of the Easter events as a News broadcast. It was broadcast on Radio T.I. on Holy Thursday.*”



(Sports photos from Doug Webb’s album, 1980s, approx 1985.)



To give the reader a feel for part of a typical year in the mid 1980s the following is presented in point form from the Minutes of several Meetings of the P&F from May to November, 1986:

- \* Some students had won prizes for Health Posters by Health dept. for the theme "Parents are Special People".
- \* Disadvantaged Schools prog is to give \$5000 towards an excursion for grades 6 and 7 to Cairns. A further \$4265 has to be raised.
- \* Spellathon was a great success.
- \* Trips to Hammond Is arranged for various grades. Mr. Francis Dorante and Mrs Garnier "spoke of the beginnings of life on Hammond Island and life on their islands. Mrs. Josie Cowley demonstrated damper making. The expense of these trips was covered by a Cultural Grant from Disadvantaged Schools Prog."
- \* Gd 7 had a day at Bamfield with Grade 6 from State School.
- \* Hammond Is Sports a great success. Champion girl—Dorothy Cowley, Champ boy -- Anson Dorante.
- \* Parent-teacher interviews held during last week of term.
- \* "Jump Rope for Heart" 40 ropes have arrived and video cassette to teach skills.
- \* Human Development Programme well attended by our pupils. Parents attendance a disappointment.
- \* Grade 7 newspaper – Jill Wordell assisted children to produce and sell newspaper.
- \* Spellathon \$1124.49.
- \* Clarence Sibley finishes to go to Mt Gravatt Teachers' College.
- \* Mention of Confirmation and meeting Bishop Bathersby, First communion.
- \* Skippathon for Heart Foundation.
- \* Excursion Fund up to \$1967. Grades one and two are having a *bring and buy*.
- \* Progressive Dinner set for 6 Sept. tickets \$15. Drum of fuel donated by Johnno Clark to be raffled.
- \* Excursion for 6 & 7 "a great experience"
- \* Mary Rose Sabatino, Rachel Swain, Jackson Beckley and Gebi Satrick won prizes in the CWA contest recently about China.
- \* Swimming carnival "an enjoyable day".
- \* "A pupil free day was held last Saturday."

## Sisters' wider ministry beyond teaching

The following miscellaneous recollections are from a memoir written by Sister Rovenia Duffy in 2011:

*"The Sisters assisted local Parishoners to participate and lead the Lenten Groups. In the latter years of being on Thursday Island the Sisters formed a Sisters of Mercy Associate group drawn from some parishioners on Thursday Island. They still meet [2011] and have meetings with the Sisters if they visit the islands."*

*"They visited those in need and those who were ill, especially those in hospital. The Sisters prepared the Church for Mass, the children for the Sacraments, the Crowning of Our Lady liturgy once a year in which all the school children participated as well as other children on the island. There were some Sundays when Sisters went to Hammond Island for Sunday Mass. They attended all Easter ceremonies and the Blessing of the Tools on the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, and Horn Island liturgies."*

*"The Sisters also visited different ones in their homes and took Holy Communion to the sick. Sister Elva helped Gwen Moloney compile the Torres News each week. (As mentioned elsewhere, this was a community event involving a number of lady friends of Gwen, to be rewarded by a grand Gwen Moloney lunch.) Sister Elva was also an active participant in the planning and execution of the Women's Day of Prayer. She also served at the stall at the Bamaga Fete. Another task was attending to the First Communion days at Weipa and Bamaga."*

## Further recollections

*"The Sacred Heart School also competed each year against the local State Schools at their annual sports. Most of the children came from other islands in the Torres Strait. Sacred Heart School and the Local State School were able to combine to take pupils on a camp to Bamfield. This was possible because of the Disadvantaged Schools Programme. Sisters, parents and pupils of the Senior School were able to go for a week. The Sisters took the children on many camps when the opportunity arose."*

## Sister Rovenia Duffy recalls

Sister Rovenia was a big force in the school in the early 1980s. With a calm manner and good sense of humour Sister Rovenia was a "what you see is what you get" type of person. She had a no frills approach, but kindly with it.<sup>14</sup> Aspects



<sup>14</sup> A contemporary colleague in conversation with Brother Barry in 2012.



of Sister Rovena's down to earth practicality will have been noted in readings earlier from the Parents and Friends' Minutes.

In a conversation with Brother Barry in 2011, Sister Rovena recalled that occasionally some children would stand on their hands and walk up the stairs on their hands. On other occasions when there were plenty of snails about there was a competition with snails where one was crashed into another. The one whose shell broke, lost. Sister told of dead snails littering the playground and smelling.

(Colin Jones, a student at the time, the 1980s, explained this disgusting "game" in greater detail<sup>15</sup>. Children would hunt for sturdy snails and then challenge another snail owner to a contest. Each would hold the snail gently with the fingers curled towards the base of the wrist. The two competing hands would then be brought together carefully so the snail shells were touching. At a signal the competing hands were steadily forced together till one shell cracked and squashed the other. If one winner managed to crush all comers, it was known as the "Thor" [or "King"], the Master Snail of the competition. Colin recalls children lining up for a chance to de-throne the Thor! We can only speculate on what Saint Francis of Assisi may have thought of this practice, albeit transitory, in a Catholic school.)



It proved difficult to teach games, such as cricket, without the children seeing a game; and understanding the various rules was hard. But when television came to the island the boys knew all about cricket virtually the next day. But when it came to actually playing a game, Sister recalls, there was not the discipline evident that cricket requires.

Sister Paul taught music. But because there were so few pianos to practise on at once, children rotated with theory lessons. Sr. Rovena remembers being asked by Sr. Paul to "hear" the students their pieces and give feedback. The purpose was not so much to give marks but to give the students something to prepare for ... having to perform for someone!

At one stage the convent was being renovated and the area in front, where there is an enormous tamarind tree, was roped off and out-of-bounds. When one child saw Sr. Mary Anne picking up fallen tamarind fruits from the ground inside the enclosed area she was told: "You've got to go to the office!"

(The accompanying image is from a painting of 1983 showing the Convent under renovations.)



## The coming of television, 1982

Prior to the coming of television to T.I. the school had a movie projector and ordered films in. Also there was a reel-to-reel video recorder, but it required constant cleaning of the "heads" with metholated spirits. But finally – 26 years after the rest of Australia – Television came to T.I. The last channel on a Japanese satellite dish was rented and a satellite dish erected on the hill at the back of the school and transmissions received from Sydney. Watching the cricket was very popular amongst the boys and at one stage, during the broadcast of the cricket, it was announced that now Thursday Island was joining the cricket!

Sister Rovena recalls that the coming of television changed the way classes were taught from then on. And pupil of the time, Colin Jones, as will be seen, recalls that afternoon and evening entertainment of children also then changed forever.

## Student recollections

Paralleling Sister Rovena's recollections are those of Colin Jones, quoted earlier. He confirms the memory of children walking on their hands and remembers the great challenge was to walk down the many steps from the church door all the way to street level without falling.

<sup>15</sup> Conversation with Brother Barry, October, 2011.

A memory of school work was his teacher, Geoff Higham, teaching the class to sing the Tables to guitar accompaniment. But his main memories were of life after class which was one of carefree adventure. With mates he would hurry to mother's Pharmacy in the main street, dump bags, have a drink and then disappear to the bush or the water's edge for exploring or adventure. At high tide there would be swimming off the wharf without a thought to any danger of sharks or crocodiles. At low tide they would see how far out on the reef they could go. Occasionally an octopus would be caught and an Islander friend would take it home for cooking.

But then Television came to T.I. in 1982<sup>16</sup> and spelt an end to these outdoors entertainments. Many boys from then on hurried home to watch afternoon television.

The Jones family lived at the eastern-most edge of the settlement of homes on T.I. and the boys and their friends lived an idyllic existence having wild bush behind them and a beach of their own. Colin described it as a Robinson Crusoe existence and he, his brother and friends, found Christmas holidays to be a most happy never-ending round of boyhood adventures.

### Three Sports Teams

1980: *"Because our enrolment has increased we have divided the school into three teams. The new team is **BARRETT** in memory of Brother Barrett, M.S.C., who worked in this area for some years."*<sup>17</sup> And we read that the Sports T-shirts have arrived and *"are selling for \$4.50"*



Though by 1987 the number of teams was reduced to two with BARRETT disappearing in 1987 for some time.<sup>18</sup>

### Renovation and the Flying Task Force of 1983

The Sisters and the School greatly benefited by a quite extraordinary "Flying Task Force" organised by Mons. John Lennon from Cairns. With 1984 being the



Centenary of the foundation of the Sacred Heart Mission by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, suitably grand celebrations were planned. And in order to prepare, renovations were undertaken to bring the Church, Convent and School up to a good state of repair.

This became possible thanks to the extraordinarily generous gift of \$100,000 from Mrs. Muriel Racey (pictured) who owned the drapery store on T.I.



The photo of the helpers with Father John Lennon in the bottom right, gives a good idea of how large an enterprise the renovations were.

<sup>16</sup> Television had begun on the mainland in 1956!

<sup>17</sup> P&F Minutes, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1980.

<sup>18</sup> P&F Minutes, 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1987.



(The photo of the convent with the roof removed was captioned by the Sisters: "The Maze Revealed". The group photo shows most of the men at Horn Island about to return to Cairns)

The great organiser, "Mons." Lennon, put the hard word on about 30 men, mainly tradesmen that he knew, to put aside several days to come to T.I. and attend to all manner of renovations. It was planned in great detail: exactly what materials were needed and which men would work on which projects. There was much camaraderie and an enormous amount of work was achieved.

### 1984 Centenary of the Sacred Heart Mission

The school and children joined in the big celebrations for the Centenary of the beginning of the Sacred Heart Mission on October 24th, 1884. The renovations mentioned above were partly in preparation for these celebrations. While this celebration was not of the arrival of the Sisters who came two years later, it was, nevertheless the start of the Catholic Church's mission to the people of the Torres Strait. Father Paul Stenhouse, MSC, longtime editor of the *Annals* and journalist reporter, recorded what he saw of the celebration<sup>19</sup>:

*"In all there were eleven priests on the island for the Centenary – and two of these were Bishops: Bishop John Torpie, in whose diocese of Cairns Thursday Island is now situated, and Bishop John O'Loughlin, MSC from Darwin, in whose diocese Thursday Island was until 1967. ...*

*Masses were celebrated on Thursday Island and Hammond Island, to commemorate the first Masses said in the Torres Strait by the French Missionaries of the Sacred Heart who reached T.I. on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1884. As well, a requiem Mass was offered for all past missionaries and parishioners of T.I. and a special commemoration was made of the first Sunday Mass ever offered in this most northern of Australian towns.*

*Visitors were treated to a feast of song in the native language, dance (with some of the dancers coming from as far away as Sabai Island just off the coast of P.N.G.) and gourmet delights that included turtle steaks and*

*numerous exotic dishes of crayfish and prawns. ...*

*Boys and girls from the State and Convent schools delighted everybody with their well-rehearsed and beautifully executed island dancing – the music was provided by both men and women who also supplied the drum accompaniment for the hymns at Mass."*<sup>20</sup>



Sisters were given and the celebrations. Amongst many other things she wrote in a letter to the Sisters on the mainland:

*"At or after every function, we renewed friendships of former days. All whom we had not met came along looking for their 'old' teacher. Finally I kept my big note-book in my pocket to jot down names of three or four generations. Each one was so pleased to bring along her grand-children or great grand-children."*

(Photo shows the 1984 community: Sisters Cheryl, Paul, Oliver, Rovenia and Patricia)

<sup>19</sup> *Annals Australia*, November/December, 1984.

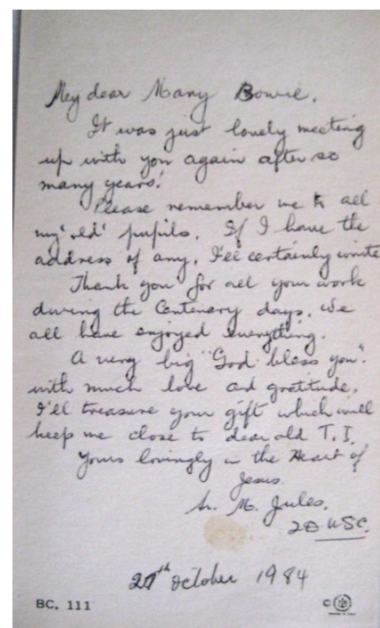
<sup>20</sup> Very much more could be told about these celebrations. A number of Sisters who had taught at the school were invited back and were grandly welcomed by the Sisters of Mercy. They wrote in deep appreciation of their welcome and their meeting up with many friends from former days. Sister M. Jules wrote an 8 page description of their welcome and the ceremonies dated "Kensington, 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov., 1984" The letter is held in the Sisters' archives in Kensington, N.S.W. Three pages have been reproduced in another chapter.



Readers may recall a similar “Holy Card” to this one in the chapter beginning in 1939. That card was given to Mary Bowe by Sister Jules in that year.

Now in 1984, forty-five years later, Sister Jules tells Mary of her delight at meeting up again at the time of the Sacred Heart Mission centenary.

Such are the lasting friendships formed by the Sisters and their pupils on T.I.



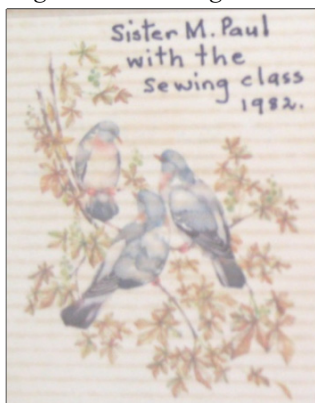
### Sister Mary Paul, long-time music teacher and friend

A much-loved and integral part of the history of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, was music teacher, Sister Mary Paul Harney. First joining the Sisters' community on T.I. in 1970, Sister Mary Paul was a constant presence, with just slight absences, till the early 1990s. The very many who knew Sr. Mary Paul may like to know more about her. And in years to come it will be interesting for the reader to learn about the background of one of the Sisters who taught for many years on T.I.

The following is copied and adapted from a testimony by an unacknowledged author (probably a Sister) at the time of Sister's death. It appeared in the *Torres News*.

*“Sister Mary Paul Harney was known to her family as Kitty and was born in County Tipperary, Ireland, in 1906, the eldest of 12 children. Four of her Sisters became Sisters of Mercy, two coming to Australia. Kitty aspired to be a Sister of Mercy in the “mission fields of North Queensland” and left Ireland just a few days short of her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The sea journey to Cairns took 7 weeks, arriving in September, 1924. After training with the Sisters at the convent in Herberton Sister was professed as Sister Mary Paul in 1930 when she began a long teaching career at St. Patrick's day school in Herberton. Prior to her appointment to Thursday Island, Sister Mary Paul taught at Edmonton, Mareeba, Atherton, Cooktown and Gordonvale.*

*In all, Sister Paul devoted 20 years of her life to the children of T.I. She showed a special affinity with children who had difficulties with learning and socialising. Eventually retiring she devoted herself to other activities: religious education in the State School, bible study groups, increasing numbers of music pupils enough to keep 4 pianos busy) and working for the annual Fete, often taking charge of several stalls. She was an accomplished seamstress, one of her specialities being cushions of every shape and size. Dolls on sticks were another speciality.*



(The photo shows Sister Paul in her later years handing on her considerable skills with the needle to young apprentice seamstresses.)

### School life in mid 1980s

Photos are available of some 1984, 1985 and 1986 classes and are reproduced here. The class on the left shows Sister Cheryl Fulton.



Photos of classrooms and classroom activities are scarce in school archives. Thankfully John Draney took some such photos; one from 1985 and the other, 1986.



Another feature of school life at this time was camping at Bamfield on Prince of Wales Island. A photo from the mid 1980s recalls the idyllic and remote nature of the setting.

Sister Patricia Butterfield recalled some of the features of a Bamfield Camp<sup>21</sup>:

*"I went to Bamfield several times. What memories! We prepared a School Work Programme for each day. I gave some lessons in pottery during the camp but it was difficult to transport the final productions intact in those circumstances!! When we arrived the first afternoon, those who wished to indulge enjoyed "Hamas" (Sp.); then we went to explore the beach. I think the latter dish consisted of fish soaked in vinegar or some such substance for several hours. The was followed by eating snails. The snails were put in a bucket of boiling water and a piece of wire was used to take out the delicate flesh. The children were very generous in offering me many pieces of wire and snails. Then there was the munching of barnacles, which were found on the sides of the boats, followed by the sound of slithering oysters. Unfortunately I couldn't enjoy the above delicacies and waited for an opportune moment to dispose of my pocket full of snails. I could always depend on Margaret See Kee's delicious meal of fish and rice. Margaret and her companions provided gourmet meals throughout our stay there."*



(Photo shows Margaret See Kee<sup>22</sup>, mentioned in Sister Patricia's memoir.)

<sup>21</sup> Written memoir prepared for Brother Barry in 2011.





*Another memory of Bamfield which I easily recall happened at Midnight as I slept in my tent (which Anthony See Kee kindly provided). I heard someone shouting, "Sr. don't open the zip on your tent, there's a wild pig outside." Needless to say I didn't venture out there. I had my slippers outside; he might assuage his hunger on those. I thought to myself, this is the very end. I didn't sleep but spent the rest of the night, interspersed between silent prayers of intercession and images of wild animals. The boys went out before five o'clock on the following morning trying to track down the unwelcome intruder."*



Sister Mary Anne, with an Irish accent, was recalled by Cheryl Fulton to be "beautifully gentle", and was remembered for leading the children in recitations, and making sure their books were neat and tidy.

The annual Crowning of Our Lady in May, a tradition going back several decades, continued. Note the

boys all in white and the flowers being carried. It was noted earlier that the hymn sung on that occasion was "Bring Flowers of the Rarest":

**Refrain:**

*O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today!  
Queen of the Angels and Queen of the May.  
O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today,  
Queen of the Angels and Queen of the May.*

Bring flowers of the rarest  
bring blossoms the fairest,  
from garden and woodland and hillside and dale;  
our full hearts are swelling,  
our glad voices telling  
the praise of the loveliest flower of the vale!



(The photo of the Crowning of Our Lady is from 1980)

<sup>22</sup> Margaret has had at the time of writing, 2012, a long association with OLSH School as parent, P&F person, tuckshop manager, camp and excursion organiser and helper, occasional cake, quiche, fish and Shepherd's Pie maker for the Brothers, both Patrician and Marist, maker of costumes for Passion Plays and concerts, etc.)



In February, 1987, Sister Brigid Foley, R.S.M., outlined the new Guidelines for Religious Education; and credit at the tuckshop was put a stop to in July!



(The photo shows Sister Rovena with a class in the early 1980s and the School Officer. Also see Sister Rovena offering some visiting Sisters a chauffeur-driven tour of the island.)



### 1988, the bi-centenary and the Adventure Playground

As 1988, the “Bi-centennial Year”, approached, there was the offer by the Bi-centenary Authority to the school of an Adventure Playground. This took some time and much paper work to become a reality, but eventually an Adventure Playground was created, thanks to Australia’s bi-centenary celebrations.

### Sister Elva Russell, Sister Patricia Butterfield and Sister Marie Masterson

Sister Elva Russell returned for her second period at Sacred Heart School in 1984 and continued in one position or another till the Sisters were finally farewelled in 1994. Known for her great love of the people, Sister Elva forged excellent rapport with the children’s parents. She had a calm yet enthusiastic manner.

When it came to the Fete, Sister Elva could be relied on to produce attractive fancy-work and crochet-work. She probably did not know that she was following in a tradition going back to 1918 when we learned that the Mother Superior had offered to the Red Cross fund-raising Paddy’s Market a specially crocheted tablecloth which raised a tidy sum for the comfort of the invalided returning troops from the First World War.

*“Sister Elva had a great respect for the Torres Strait Islanders cultural and Spiritual values. This was exemplified, particularly in her promotion of Island Dancing through Cultural Grants from The Disadvantaged Schools Programmes. The applications for these and other Grants necessitated spending many hours outside of school time. Anything which was beneficial for the pupils received top priority. Quarterly Work Books, which outlined in some detail all areas of the Curriculum, were submitted.”<sup>23</sup>*



On retiring from the Principalship at the end of 1997, Sister Elva became a tireless Pastoral Care worker frequently visiting the hospital and the homes of troubled or berieved families. She had a special love for the Hammond Island community among whom she had made very close friends.<sup>24</sup>

Sister Patricia Butterfield, beginning again on T.I. in 1984 (she had served just the one year in 1979), likewise continued till the final years of the Mercy Sisters apostolate at Sacred Heart school. Sister Patricia was

<sup>23</sup> From a memoir written by Sister Patricia Butterfield for Brother Barry in 2011.

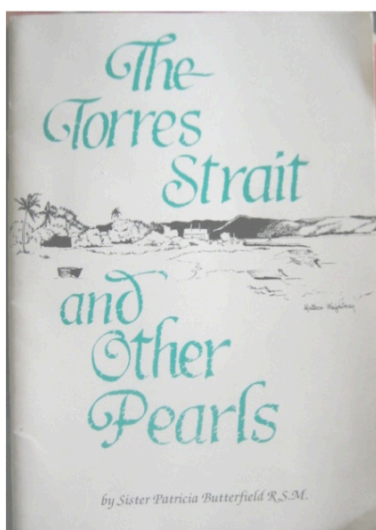
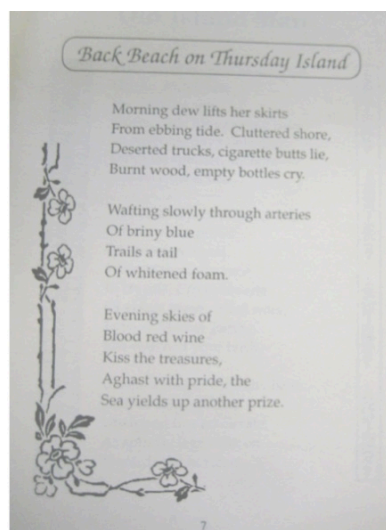
<sup>24</sup> As told by Sister Marie Masterson to Brother Barry in 2011.



remarkable for her devotion to the children who needed extra help with their English. For a number of years Sr. Patricia had the role of ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher in the school. Described by a colleague as very committed and throwing herself “heart and soul” into everything she did, she was always a dynamo of enthusiasm. She “really taught” is how her teaching was described. When someone remarked that her pupils knew their tables and their spelling, Sister Patricia explained simply that the trick was old-fashioned regular repetition and learning “by heart”. And many of her pupils benefited through life, thanks to this learning. Well remembered, too, are Sister Patricia’s *Spellathons*. Children

would be sponsored 10c. or 50c. or such, a word. Depending on how many words they spelled correctly in the test they would earn their sponsorship money for that number of words. On a designated day an outside person would be engaged to administer the test after much preparation and revision on the part of teachers. Sister Patricia recalled: *“Aunts, uncles, tourists, barmen and barwomen were all involved. It was always a financial success and I think some adults profited from the experience!”*<sup>25</sup>

A recollection of Sister Patricia (of relatively fair skin), which she tells on herself, is well worth recording for its amusement. She tells of spending a particular Sports Day on Hammond Island in the sun without sufficient shade cover; with the result that she became badly sunburned, necessitating a visit to the hospital where she was “covered with a cream-like substance and thick, white bandages.” She was advised to take things easy. The story continues in her own words:



*“The Yearly Christmas Concert was held on the following night. Teachers presented their well prepared, often humorous items to a packed audience. (By the way there was no hope of a Relief Teacher in those days.) I had to face the Music. When my Cowboys and their dashing partners graced the floor, peals of laughter broke out and cameras clicked, NOT at the pupils swinging to the strains of ‘She’ll Be Coming Round the Mountain, When She Comes’, but at the spectacular sight of my bandages!”*

As well as her community and classroom duties, Sister Patricia was a wizard at Arts and Crafts, creating an array of attractive objects for sale at the annual Fete,

particularly pottery. She credits Maxine Price, a teacher at the State School at the time, with stimulating her interest in pottery. Maxine gave the teachers interested at both the State and Convent schools lessons in pottery. *“I made many decorated glazed pots,”* Sister Patricia recalled, *“and with the proceeds purchased quite a few Cassette players for the school.”*

Another of her specialities was candle-making, using the butts of burnt-out candles that she would cadge from priests on the mainland. Sister’s own description of these craft items is thus:

*“For the Fete I made candles. Buckets of sand were hauled up from the beach in the truck, the moulds containing coloured, melted wax were placed in the wet sand where they remained for several days. Then there were the miniature “suites” of furniture, consisting of lounge chairs, tables and chairs, all made from painted clothes pegs. Roses were made from white shells, the edges of which were painted different colours then glued*

<sup>25</sup> From Sister Patricia’s memoir, 2011.



*on to varnished pieces of wood. Even the boys participated. Before school they crocheted table centres in wool!!”<sup>26</sup>*

Besides giving an emphasis to poetry in her home classes, occasionally Sr. Patricia would take some students who showed aptitude in poetry and she would encourage them to compose poems, and occasionally enter them into competitions ... not without success. A poet herself, Sr. Patricia penned a number of poems with the Torres Strait as the backdrop. Her poem, “Back Beach on Thursday Island” was accepted for publication in a collection of poems.

Another of Sister Patricia’s duties was to look after the preparation of the Church for all occasions, often a time-consuming and hot job. She became a familiar figure around T.I., getting about, as she did, on a her trusty bicycle.

Sister Patricia concluded her memoir with these words:

*“Like all the Sisters of Mercy who served on Thursday Island I carry many fond memories and lasting friendships of my time there.*

*God’s blessing with love upon you  
As you travel each road ahead,  
May each day be filled with His Son’s Light  
As by his spirit your steps are led.”*



Sister Marie Masterson served the school from 1985 to 1989. A custom that she developed that the children dearly loved – both her Grade 3s and also Grade 7s – was a period of meditation straight after coming back into school after the excitement of the lunch break. Assisted by a tape-recording that led the children to relax and focus, the ten or so minutes of meditation had a great settling effect. And if it was going to be skipped, the children were quick to insist that they had this time of meditation. As Sister Marie recalls, “they loved it.”

Sister Marie rated her T.I. pupils as, “*the most enthusiastic classes that I have ever taught; they were really interested and really involved and anxious to learn.*”

Besides her work in the classroom, Sister Marie had a reputation as a wonderful cook and cake ice-er. She could decorate a wedding cake with most professional filigrees of icing tracery. The Plant Stall at the Fete was another of Marie’s interests, and nurturing a variety of plants throughout the year was a hobby that came to a head with the Fete in late October. Sister Marie also was a potter, a hobby she shared with Sister Patricia. A variety of pots were likewise prepared for sale at the fete.



<sup>26</sup> From Sister Patricia’s memoir.



## Continuing P&F support, 1980-1989

Cake stalls, raffles and the annual Fete continued to be patiently undertaken by the P&F through the late 1980s to provide income for various projects and for the maintenance of things breaking down. New ideas and fashions in fund-raising came and went. A monthly “Silver Circle” was in vogue for a time; a “Monster Raffle” at another. A walkathon was proposed at one stage in connection with the Fete, and the sale of chocolates was also proposed.



The Presidents in this period were John Walker, Ron Thompson, Johnno Clark, Romina Fujii, Robyn SeeKee and Chi Chi Fujii.

It was a P&F initiative in February, 1980, that there might be special T-shirts for boys for sports teams, if possible, at a reasonable cost. At a subsequent Meeting in April it was announced that the T-shirts had arrived and “are selling for \$4.50.” Early in 1981 Sister Rovena suggested to the P&F that “colour coordinated monograms for sports uniforms could be introduced.”

A bold suggestion is made at the Meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1988 that for the cake stall, “All parents are asked to make a cake”! And a Family Night was suggested to include donuts, fairy-floss, Hoop-la, Wheels, Drinks (Chicken wheels – 20c; cakes – 10c.) There was also “Dinner at Gwen’s”: \$15 a ticket, limited to 30 people; advertised in *Torres News*. A Garden Party with music, singing and a poetry recital was proposed. Nearly every Meeting of the P&F told of another money-making venture ... either a proposal or a success reported on. The tuckshop that had been a problem in earlier years was on a sound footing and it is interesting to note a remark in the Minutes of April, 1980, that, “It is possible [for a child] to get a good lunch for \$1.” The tuckshop was only operating at this time three days a week and a check in March, 1981, revealed that, “At present there are about 60 children obtaining lunch downtown.” Father Miah McSweeney was still anxious about this during 1982 and a daily tuckshop was proposed as a solution. Bob Peddell was to be approached to see if he could provide lunches and at the Meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> October it is reported that the new tuckshop arrangement with Peddells is “proving to be satisfactory.”

An insight into human nature’s acceptance of the way things are might be gained by learning that ever since the introduction of lay teachers more than two decades previously there had been no toilets built for lay staff, and the custom was to use the toilets at the Sisters’ convent. It finally dawned that staff toilets would be a good idea! The same with the telephone. For almost a century the school telephone had been the Sisters’ phone. It was only at the suggestion of Sr. Elva to the P&F in February, 1987, that this situation was changed. “I would like to propose that the school telephone be made separate from the Convent phone. It would be more practical I think to change the Convent number.”

When the flagpole rope perished or when the Confirmation party was to be augmented by frozen Bi-Jingoes there was always the ever-reliable P&F in the background only too keen to help.



Sister Marie remembers, in the late 1980s, that making and selling doughnuts was a successful fund-raiser. Under the leadership of Gwen Moloney a small team would produce a continual stream of doughnuts from a doughnut machine set up close to the main street of T.I. She remembers that the smell of the



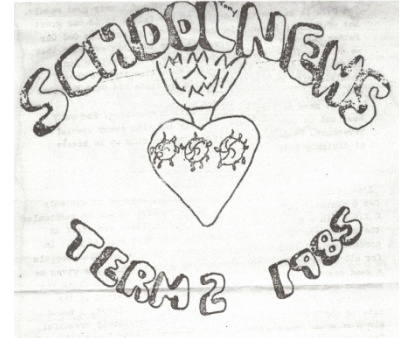


cooking was discernable in the town from a considerable distance and there was never a lack of willing customers. Sales were in batches of twenty.

Another, somewhat odd, lucrative income-earner, Sister Marie recalled, was a group of children with some adult assistance, clearing part of the old T.I. cemetery. She remembers that it paid very well, through sponsorship of different industries throughout the town.

### Insights into 1985

With the impulse of the energy of youngish teacher, Doug Webb, who had answered the call from the Cairns Catholic Education Office to join the staff of OLSH School, T.I. in 1984, Grade 7 was coaxed into producing a school newspaper, "School News". From its pages we learn a number of interesting things about the school from that year. Various events recorded, such as the Bamfield Camp, tell of activities that happened on a regular basis, and so are descriptive of school life at other times, too.



The Bamfield Camp was mentioned earlier, but since pupil Harriet Durante's write-up is found in the *School News* of 1985 it is reproduced here:

(The photos are from Doug Webb's album.)

GRADE 7 CAMP ★

The grade seven students went to Bamfield on the 11th of June. The people who were supervising us were Mr Webb, Mrs Wagner, Miss Zappala, Sireako and Bernarl. There were 20 students. Some of the things we did at Bamfield were reef walking, swimming, working in groups, maths, tree study and pool study. We went to Dugong Story on Wednesday. It was fun swimming and walking. We saw horses in the morning and found foot prints in the sand. It was fun at Bamfield because we were working in pairs and groups. Father Mullins came to Bamfield on Thursday and said mass for us.

Reporter - Harriet Dorante.

A hand-drawn illustration of a camp scene. It shows a large tent in the center, with several trees to its left and right. A person is standing near the tent. The background is filled with stars and clouds.



Another innovative idea was for groups of Year 7s to run the school Tuckshop for “little lunch” over a four day period. Each group was given \$50 to make purchases and prepare them for sale. The “*School News*” report states: “*We sold cheese sticks, popcorn, ice blocks, apples, sausages, eggs and sultanas.*” Over the four days a profit of \$14.00 was made and this was put towards taking the youngest children for a trip to the beach and shouting them sweets.

Writing letters to children in a number of other schools was another very practical way of improving writing accuracy and the conventions of letter writing. The schools in the Cairns area that were the recipients of the Grade 7s letters were St. Joseph’s, St. Augustine’s, St. Francis Xavier’s, Good Counsel, St. Therese’s, St. Michael’s, Our Lady Help of Christians and Good Counsel in Innisfail. “Patricia” was the reporter who posted this story in the paper.



“The *School News* for 1985 also featured school news from other classes. The Grade 2s listed the things they enjoyed during Term 2, eg.: “Liam: I enjoyed playing with blocks”; “Farren: I liked having baseball for sport”; “Sharee: I like to read books.” Grade 4 were reported to have written letters to the Grade 4s at Gordonvale, to have attended a piano recital by classmates Almira Majid, Veronica Filewood, Michelle Webb, Annie Pearson and Simone Wagner, and to have done exercises in weighing while making Bread Rolls.

The newsletter also reported on how the Year 7 students were faring who had gone on the High School, and at another time a number of interviews were conducted and a number of sources read in order to put together a time-line of the history of the school since 1887.

### **The Sisters relinquish the Principalship of the school, end 1987.**

1987 was the final year the Cairns Sisters of Mercy held the Principalship of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School. However, the four Sisters in the community at the time continued on T.I. in various ministries. Sister Mary Paul continued with several music students. Sister Elva became a vital presence in the parish community and Sister Marie and Sister Patricia continued to take classes as we shall see in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 29

### Lay Teachers and the beginning of Lay leadership

In decades and centuries to come it will be with scarcely-believing amazement that readers will realise that the whole school enterprise of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, was conducted by merely two, sometimes three, teaching Sisters unaided by any secretaries or any additional teachers whatsoever. Occasionally the Sisters had a Sister in the community who would attend to the Sisters' laundry and cooking etc. But not in the school! And it must be remembered that from the 1890s to 1941 there was also the daily attendance to the boarding students at the "Orphanage" and the multitude of tasks that that involved. It was only in the 1960s that we first learn of the addition of a "Lay teacher" and/or a "Teacher's Aide" to assist in the school.

And as time goes by, of course, the Lay teachers were to replace the Religious as the ones entrusted to nurture the love of Jesus in the pupils, and teach them His way and the Traditions of the Catholic faith; as well, of course, as all the other subjects of the curriculum.

The earliest mention of lay teachers seems to be in the *Torres News* of March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1966 where we read, "New teacher at OLSH Convent School is Mrs. A. Valentine." The Inspector's Report of 1966<sup>1</sup> tells of the school having a "lay teacher" and also a "monitress who also supervises the transport of certain young children to a nearby island."

The lay teacher is taking Grades III and IV. , while, "The monitress renders valuable aid especially with Grade I as she understands the young native pupils who sometimes find difficulty with both number and language. ... The lay teacher is industrious and sincere, her methods being orthodox and sound."

In 1966 there remains, "a lay teacher and a coloured monitoress who also supervises the transport of certain young children to a nearby island."

In 1967, however, it appears the lay teacher is Mrs Verfeurden, mentioned by Sister Christopher in her memoir of the Farewell to the Sisters in 1967. Father Miah McSweeney, in a letter June 20 1967, says, "The Dutch lady left ... about a week before I arrived. At present the 2 Srs with the assistance of a native girl ... and an American girl<sup>2</sup> is taking 3 and 4 and getting \$60 a week. This of course couldn't continue."



There is another reference in 1967:

*"Numerous Staff changes in recent months have placed stresses on the organisation of the school. The resignation of a Lay Teacher and the inability to have her replaced resulted in the senior grades being transferred to the State School."*

The staff, at the time of the inspection, consisted of the Sister-in-charge, one other Sister (part time), a Lay Teacher and "a young Teacher-Aide of Torres Strait Island extraction." The name of this lay teacher could not be found at the time of writing (2011).

In 1968 is mention of "a young Teacher-Aide." This was Miss Judith Sabatino (see photo). In 1969 there is mention, now, of three Sisters, of a "Teacher-Aide"; so it appears that the lay teacher has been replaced by a Sister. In 1972 there are four teaching Sisters for the 109 children, with one Teacher's Aide. The four Sisters are Sister Matthew (Margaret) Rush, Sr. Nicholas Flemming, Sr. Annunciata Schmid, Sr. Oliver and the Teacher's Aide is Miss Grace



<sup>1</sup> Inspection 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July, 1966..

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing (2011) no name has been found for this "American girl".

Kibisu. Miss Kibisu continues as Teacher's Aide till 1976 with maybe a break during 1974. Miss Bonnie Leathers joins the staff for just 1973.

Miss Josephine (Judith) Sabatino returns in 1975, 1976 and 1977. In 1976 there are two lay teachers on the staff: Miss Erin Mosen and Mrs. Benedicta Chung.

There is a *Time Capsule* buried in Anzac Park on T.I. and it was placed there during the Centenary celebrations of the island in 1977. It lists all the children in the school at the time as well as the teachers. From it we learn that in 1977 Sister Elva, R.S.M., was Principal, and in Grade 1 the teacher was Sister Mary Consilia Wallwork with Mrs. Tina Whittaker as Teacher Aide. Grades 2 and 3 were taught by Sister Maureen Russell assisted by Teacher Aide Miss Judy Sabatino. Taking Grades 4 and 5 was Mr. Allister Croker, and Sister Elva Russell taught Grades 6 and 7. While Mrs. Whittaker only stays during 1977, Allister Croker, who arrived in May, 1977, continues till 1979. And fortunately we have a photo of Allister accompanying a group of students by ferry to the Annual Sports on Hammond Island in 1979. (In white shirt and shorts holding banner). Geoff

Higham was also on the staff in 1979. (Christine Sabatino and Bernadette Sabatino were part of the staff at this time, also.)



In 1980, with a school roll of an enormous 173, the teaching staff consisted of Sister Concilia, Sr. Mary Paul (music), Sr. Elva Russell and Sr. Joan Steele (after May) along with Miss Julie Melit and Mr. Greg Goldie. Mr. Goldie remained till 1982 while Miss Melit continued till 1983.

(Photos shows Miss Julie Melit with one class and Mr. Greg Goldie with another.)

Before that time Miss Tina McDonald had joined the staff (1981) and continued till 1983, while Mr. Brian Larkin taught during 1981.

Before the mid 1980s it was the custom to advertise far and wide for lay teachers to augment the staff at Sacred Heart School. In 1984 the Catholic Education Office of Cairns decided to invite teachers, already teaching in the Primary schools of Cairns, to consider teaching for several years on T.I. And in this way John Draney, Vera Zappala and Doug Webb joined the staff in 1984 or thereabouts. Doug Webb remembers that the Cairns Catholic Education Office produced a video showing



Thursd  
ay Island and inviting teachers to consider devoting a year or two to teaching at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School.



An early  
staff  
photo  
showing  
lay staff  
of 1980  
is one  
from

Christine Benjamin's album: Back -- \_\_\_\_\_, Sr. Joan Steele, Judy Sabatino, \_\_\_\_\_, Sr. Elva, Julie Melit, Greg Goldie, Allister Croker; Front – Lorraine Walker, Sr. Concilia, Christine Benjamin.





A 1982 Staff photo shows: Standing – Robert Nosedá, Tina McDonald, Paul Kennedy, Marcia Hunt (Teacher's Aide), Sr. Rovená, Sr. Joan; Seated – Lorraine Walker, Louise Verden, Sr. Paul, Julie Melit.

And so began the normal mix of Religious and Lay teachers in the staff of the school that was to continue for some years. Photos from John Draney's Album show the staffs of 1985 and 1986.

The Staff for 1985, as in the photo, are: Back – John Draney, Sr. Marie, Clarence Sibley, Vera Zappala, Doug Webb; Front – Veronica Bowie, Sr. Patricia, Sr. Elva, \_\_\_\_\_, Patricia Hull.

In 1986 the staff, as in the photo, consists of: Back – John Draney, Patsy Moloney, Clarence Sibley, Jill Wardle; Front – Sr. Elva, Sr. Marie, Sr. Patricia, Helen Fraser.

Sister Mary Paul taught music for all these years but does not appear in the staff photos, presumably because she did not teach a particular class and was therefore, in a way, not "on the staff". She is, however, a constant presence in the Sisters' Community and in the school for very many years and loved and remembered by many for her kindnesses and her music teaching. There is a tribute to Sister Mary Paul in the Chapter on the period of the Mercy Sisters.

There are further names of staff for 1986, but some only taught for a short time. They include Marguerite Giavarra (one Term), Mario Sabatino (one Term), Donna Potts (short period), Patsy Maloney, Shelita Nona and Diane Laifoo. They did not continue into 1987.



In 1987 we find the addition of Miss Leonie Henson, Miss Therese Flynn and Miss An Meerleveld. Therese Flynn continued through 1988 also.



In 1988 Miss Delia O'Donnell (pictured) becomes the first Lay Teacher to take over as Principal of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School while Sister Elva remained Superior of the Sisters' community and Sister Patricia continued to take a class in the school. Sister Paul continued to teach music and Sister Elva moved into Parish work.

Also joining the staff in 1987 was Mrs. Christine Benjamin as a Teacher's Aide, a position she maintained till 1993 with a break during 1991. Also in 1988, for just the one year, was Miss Weston. Joining the staff the following year, 1989, were Mr. Robert Hayles and Miss Tina Sabatino.

Three teachers come for just the one year of 1990: Miss Susie Poetsch, Miss Therese Cowley and Mrs. Dalia Conforth. Mr. Tony Penisi joins in 1990 and remains during 1991. Joe Dwyer comes in 1991 and stays during 1992 while Therese Pocock teaches for just 1991.

A "General Information Sheet" had been prepared by the Catholic Education Office setting out the possibility of teaching at Sacred Heart School, T.I., and the accommodation available. It mentioned that, *"Accommodation is provided for four single teachers in two flats. These flats consist of two large bedrooms,*



*living room, kitchen, toilet, bathroom and front verandah.” It told of the population of T.I., the cost of living and recreational opportunities on the island. Besides warning that, “The children of the island present a challenge educationally” it was also promised that, “They are handsome children, bright and loveable.” Readers of the Information Sheet were assured: “All teachers who have gone to Thursday Island have been happy that they have accepted the challenge.”*

There are several new faces in 1992: Miss Niva Nayodi, Miss Paula Foster, Mrs. Joanne Dwyer, Mrs Therese Pearson (Teacher’s Aide), Miss Marietta Garnier (Liaison Officer) and Miss Harriet Dorante (Teacher’s Aide).



When Bishop James Foley visited the school to bless an extension in 1993 a photo was taken that shows the staff at that time (plus some others). It includes a photo of the Principal since 1988, Miss Delia O'Donnell (Third in from the back, right).

In a fax from Father Tyrone Deere of July 1994<sup>3</sup> addressed to Bishop Foley is listed the staff at that time as :

*“Delia O'Donnell, Principal, Pat Priestly, C.E.O., Ian Hodges and Jenny Hodges, Bernadette Ryan (just two weeks to go) and*

*Chris \_\_\_\_\_ who had recently finished. Vanessa Crowdy was also on the staff and Sr. Patricia was special teacher for slow-learner readers. Some of the teachers were resident in the three teachers' units at the Star of the Sea site.”*

### Crisis in teacher accommodation

This site, where the Catholic Education Office had acquired some extra units as accommodation for lay teachers, caused an enormous headache for some time during 1994. The Parents & Friends Association wrote to the Chairman of the Diocesan Financial Board on 22<sup>nd</sup> June of that year emphasizing the “accommodation crisis” for the lay teachers and urging, *“that action should be taken to ensure long term assurance of suitable residences for our teachers.”*

There developed correspondence between the school P&F, the Catholic Education Office and the Diocesan Secretary (Fr. John B. Lennon) as to who should shoulder responsibility for the provision of teacher accommodation. In part of Father Lennon’s letter of 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1994, he states, *“The Parish operates on the smell of an oil rag, the principal source of income being the annual Parish Fete.”* In this way he attempted to take focus away from any imagined responsibility of the Parish being in any position to take on the financial burden of supplying suitable accommodation.

In the course of this correspondence was mention of the dire state of the accommodation at the Star of the Sea site:

*“The Old Peoples' Home have informed us<sup>4</sup> that all teachers will be required to vacate their units by December. At present building is going on around them with blasting resulting in broken windows and some internal furnishings e.g. clock and glasses breaking. Also there have been several break-ins in the units at the Old Peoples' Home and one break-in at the Principal's residence. Security is becoming a concern.”*

(Photo shows the first purpose-built teacher accommodation directly behind (to the north) of the school buildings.)



<sup>3</sup> Cairns Diocesan archives.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Miss T. M. Creagh, Diocesan Director of Education, Cairns Diocese, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1994.

On 5<sup>th</sup> July and on 13<sup>th</sup> July further letters were sent from the concerned Catholics of Thursday Island to the Cairns authorities. A reply was received from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (Brisbane) dated 21<sup>st</sup> July and the solution to the accommodation problem at that stage remained unresolved.

A statement, on letterhead of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Thursday Island, dated 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1994, “TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN”, outlined the dire need for suitable accommodation for lay teachers. The letter supported a submission for funding addressed to the Dept. Of Education and Training, Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Programme non-Government Capital Funding. It was signed by Ian Hodges, Vanessa Crowdey, Jeanette Hodges, Paula Byrnes and Sr. Patricia Butterfield. The archives also holds letters of support from the Hammond Island Council and also the Torres Strait Islander Regional Educational Consultative Committee.

The upshot was that after much struggle and anxiety accommodation was built. The diocese of Cairns<sup>5</sup> agreed to a proposal to build “2 x 2 bedroom units to be erected next to the present teacher accommodation.” Father Lennon emphasised the gravity of the situation when he stated: “*Frankly I think that the C.E.O. has nowhere else to go and the likelihood of a ‘walk-out’ is not over dramatised. It will do us no good if the problem is not solved.*”

Delia O’Donnell continued as Principal till Bishop Foley gained a favourable response from the Patrician Brothers in 1995 who provided Brother Paul O’Keeffe as Principal. Two Patrician Brothers, Joseph Guidera and Cronan O’Meara, also assisted in the school. However when Brother Paul was appointed Provincial of his congregation during 1998 he continued till Christmas, to be replaced, in 1999 by Mrs. Carmel Rosman who continued as Principal till some time in 2001.

In 2001 Mr. George de Jong was appointed Principal, but only remained in the position a short time. Mr. Tony Tulacz then stepped into the role of Acting Principal. Tony had previously been a very dynamic member of staff at the school since 1996, and his wife, Sylvie, was also teaching at Sacred Heart at the same time (and previously on Hammond Island), a much valued Special Education teacher.

Thereafter Mrs Pat Priestly took on the role of Principal till the end of 2003, to be followed by Mrs Maree Read in 2004. Mrs Jenny Chivilo was Pat Priestly’s Deputy for part of this period.

In 2006 Mrs. Lisette Spaul became Principal, a position she held for two years: 2006 and 2007. Beginning in 2008, Miss Helen Kett assumed the Principalship, a position she held till (at least) the celebrations of the School’s 125 years in 2012.



Front Row: Josephine David-Petero, Chi Fujii, Tim Beencke, Helen Kett, Marion Ball, Gayle Frank  
 Second Row: Tallie Frank, Linda Miley, Christine Benjamin, Margaret See Kee, Salluer Dorante, Christine Gawne, Tauvale Faleono  
 Back Row: Claire Thompson, Bernadine David, Stacey Whiteside, Jenny Kairupan-Vellis, Celeste Whiting  
 Absent: Lasmitan Ah Boo, Harriet Dorante, John Dorante, Marsha Loban, Sharon Love, Little Tambo

The 2011 staff photo (above) shows the changes in the proportion of Religious to Lay teachers since the first lay teacher joined the Sisters in 1966. Brother Timothy Beencke (front row), a Marist Brother, was the sole Religious on the staff in 2011. Another comparison with earlier times is the total number of the staff for the student population. In 1964 when it was Sisters only conducting the school there were two teaching Sisters for a school roll of 92.<sup>6</sup> In 1964 there were two teaching Sisters, one lay teacher and one “monitress”; the school roll was 110.<sup>7</sup> The total number on the staff in 2011 was 24 for approximately 100 children.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum by Fr. J.B. Lennon, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 1995

<sup>6</sup> Inspector’s Report, 13-14 July, 1964.

<sup>7</sup> Inspector’s Report of 18-19<sup>th</sup> July, 1966.



To present this in a more dramatic way the reader may like to glance at this brief chart:

	No. of Religious	No. of lay teachers	No. of Aides/other staff	No. of students
<b>1964</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>1966</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>102</b>

A pause may be required to take in this most interesting and amazing information!



(The bell pictured was the school bell for many years. When it went missing temporarily in 2011 it was replaced with the playing of snatches of lively popular music, and had not been replaced since then, at the time of writing, 2012.)

## CHAPTER 30

### School Life and changes, 1988 to 1994



The passing of the Principalship of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School from the Sisters of Mercy to the first lay Principal, Miss Delia O'Donnell (pictured), was a significant milestone in the history of the school.

For more than a century in Australia it was taken for granted that Catholic schools were conducted by Religious: Sisters, Priests or Brothers. It had not always been so, of course. In colonial Australia, the earliest Catholic schools were conducted by lay men and women. The first was established in Parramatta in Sydney in 1820 by Father John Joseph Therry, the first official Catholic Chaplain of the colony of New South Wales. He engaged George Morley as the teacher. There had been a system whereby such a teacher was paid from the public purse. But then in the 1880s there was legislation, particularly in New South Wales, where publicly funded education would be “free, secular and compulsory.” As a result, if parents were to send their children to a Catholic

school they would have to pay. The Bishops decided to ask for Sisters and Brothers from the religious orders in the British Isles and Europe to come to open schools for the Catholic children. (And St. Mary McKillop had begun the Sisters of St. Joseph in Australia, and the Bishops were not shy in calling on her for Sisters). Because such teachers taught “for the love of God” and were very modest in their living habits and requirements, it was a way of providing a good education for the Catholic community “on the cheap.”

Let us now review school life from the time Miss O'Donnell assumed the Principalship.

Many things, of course, did not change. All subjects continued to be taught; Religious Education classes were continued; the Sports day at Hammond Island continued; the children were prepared each year for the Sacraments; class teachers took a keen personal and pastoral interest in the lives of the children in their care; Each May there was a ceremonial crowning of Our Lady's statue; a happy, nurturing atmosphere continued to be fostered in the school.

Children accept whatever happens in a school as just the way things are. And this feeling of little change was supported by the continued presence of Sisters on the school staff and in the nearby community. Sister Mary Paul, as solid a presence in the school as Green Hill on T.I., continued to teach music and take some children for sewing. Sister Elva was still nearby working in the wider community. Sister Patricia and Sister Marie were daily in the thick of the school.

But a most interesting mood amongst some parents is revealed in a Report Miss O'Donnell gave to the meeting of the Parents & Friends of 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1988, only days after she had begun as Principal.

*“This is what we are here for – to give our children a full education – through the spirit of the gospels. This talk of sending our children to the [State] Primary School is a great worry to me as the whole idea of Catholic Schools is to bring our children up in the atmosphere of our religion – I know I am speaking to the converted – but you have an influence, a duty to point these facts out.”*

#### **Sr ELVA WANTS TO KNOW YOU**



Sister Elva, recently retired principal of the Lady of the Sacred heart School on Thursday Island, plans to spend most of this year visiting people in the large Sacred Heart parish

“Work in a parish such as ours covers many areas but for the moment I will get to know our people and allow them to get to know me,” Sister Elva told Torres News.

She said visiting families, the sick, and the lonely would help her get to know the needs and wishes of the people.

Next month the second session of a spiritual renewal program ‘Renew’ will start and Sister Elva hopes to take an active part in it.

There will be discussion and prayer groups to help all renew their commitment to their faith.

“My sincere hope is that my moving around in all parts of our parish will be a reminder of God's presence in our midst,” she said.

Miss Delia O'Donnell has taken up the position of principal at Sacred Heart School on TI. Miss O'Donnell has been teaching for the past 13 years and has had experience with all grades of primary school. She was recently teaching at St John's Catholic Church in East Frankston in Melbourne.



Delia O'Donnell was remembered by a colleague of the time as enthusiastic and fun-loving, often participating merrily in activities with the children. Delia's interest and expertise in music, too, was a special contribution to school life in those times. She was able to get the children to participate with joy and fun in classroom singing. She was very supportive of staff and new ideas and had a caring way of dealing with the child who had problems.<sup>1</sup> Her presence at, and contribution to parish liturgies through music, were much appreciated by Father Tyrone Deere. And he added in a letter to Bishop James Foley during 1992, "She has done an excellent job of preparing the children for a break-up concert."<sup>2</sup>

## SACRED HEART SCHOOL

Last Monday three English as a Second Language teachers from Cairns Diocese arrived on Thursday Island to run a week-long ESL program at the Sacred Heart School. The ESL team consists of two resource teachers, Ms Geraldine Fitzgerald and Mrs Gayeline Steventon, and team Co-ordinator Ms Pamela Evans.

Included in the ESL program were meetings with staff to provide teachers with relevant ESL resources and an in-service program using the kit "teaching for a multicultural Australia". Also the development of a school based curriculum, an ESL in-service program designed for all teachers in the Cairns Diocese, a renewal of the process writing program already developed in the school and research into producing a "Kids of the Torres Strait" series of books.

The ESL team were a wonderful help, and have given the Sacred Heart teachers much inspiration. On Wednesday 16, Toni-Ann Mayer, a year 12 student from the high school will be attending the school as part of the work experience program. Toni-Ann has a special interest in physical education, and she will be assisting with sports and physical education until the end of next week.

*e focused on the Renew Program which most Catholic Schools will be following. This week's theme will be -- "Come" -- where the children are encouraged to come to Jesus -- just as they are."*

As can be seen from the facsimile from the *Torres News* of March 18<sup>th</sup>, there was the introduction of "ESL". This acronym, "ESL,"

Delia, too, fostered close relations with the staff of the State Primary School and with Father McSweeney would host barbeques for the staffs of both schools.

Sister Elva, as can be seen by the extract "**Sr ELVA WANTS TO KNOW YOU**"<sup>3</sup>, began a new apostolate ministering to the wider T.I. parish and community.

Glen Lawler joined the staff as a new teacher at the start of 1988 and the children began the year being invited to draw their hopes and ambitions and to reflect on the year ahead.<sup>4</sup> These pictures were placed on the altar during the opening Mass.

School activities for the year were announced during February. An "afternoon of activities" was inaugurated which included on a rotational basis, "art, craft, drama, sport, filming, music and gardening."<sup>5</sup> The report in the *Torres News* continued:

*"This year [1988] the school is emphasizing the use of their computer and their video camera. The video camera is becoming an important asset in the Language, Drama and Religious Education Programs. ... There are fewer students this year which will enable each child to receive a greater degree of individualized instruction. ... The R.E. Program for the next 6*

## SACRED HEART SCHOOL INVADE THE CAMP

Last weekend an energetic and enthusiastic bunch of grades 4 and 5 children from Sacred Heart School invaded "Barnfield Camp" on Prince of Wales Island. The children and teachers had a wonderful time and all had sad faces on Monday when the "Ronald Shipway" appeared around the headland to take them home. Some of the activities the children did included, classifying objects found on the beach, scavenger hunts, reef walks, and maths activities. The favourite activities however, were swimming in the top waterfall and the night games. Throughout the day the teachers were constantly asked "Is it time for swimming?" "Are we going to the big pool today?" and "Can we play lantern stalk tonight!" The school would like to thank Father Mullins who went out to Barnfield on Sunday for a special open air mass for the children, and to Anthony SeeKee for not only taking Father out, but also for a

container of ice cream, which was demolished fairly quickly! Also thanks to the cooks Jean Garnier, Judy Arndt, Rosaleen and the girls. And a special thanks to Brian Arndt for all his efforts before and during the weekend.

Today is Sacred Heart's annual Hammond Island Sports Day, so the big friendly rivalry between the two sports teams "Doyle" and "McDermott" is on again!

The high jump and long jump events were completed earlier in the week, and the two teams are very close on points. The school hopes the day is a success and wish all the children the best of luck!

Last Wednesday children from grades 1 and 2 participated in the under 8's "Day in the Park". They had a fantastic time doing all sorts of activities like making kites, blowing bubbles, coating themselves in slime, coconut leaf weaving, singing and painting.

SACRED HEART SCHOOL

<sup>1</sup> As told to Brother Barry by Sister Marie Masterson in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Letter in Cairns Diocese Archives.

<sup>3</sup> *Torres News*, February, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, February 5<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, February 19<sup>th</sup>.

was destined to become part of the accepted vocabulary of education in Australia for several decades. Meaning “English as a Second Language” it was a program for the teaching of English to those whose first language was not English. It’s interesting to note, also, in the context of the Islander and other ethnic origins of many of the citizens (and pupils) of Thursday Island, that there was an inservice program for the using of a kit “teaching for a multicultural Australia.” As the years go by the concept of “multiculturalism” in Australian society is one that generates much discussion.

The Adventure Playground, which was a Bi-Centenary Project for the school, was blessed and opened on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February. All who had generously helped, with John Clark being specially singled out, were thanked for their valuable help over many Saturday mornings.<sup>6</sup>

In May the Grades 4 and 5 headed off to Bamfield for a camp filled with interesting activities. The attached extract from the *Torres News* of May 20<sup>th</sup> tells the story. Years 6 and 7 enjoyed their camp at Bamfield in June.<sup>7</sup>

History was made last Sunday with the first ever Catholic procession through the streets of Thursday Island. It was a double celebration as well as being the feast of Corpus Christi. It was the day eleven children left the church after mass with Fr. Mullins carrying the blessed sacrament, the canopy bearers were from TI, Bamaga and Hammond Island.

To the delightful strain of “Here I am Lord”, (played by Mrs M Mills on the organ and guitar accompanists Miss Terese Flynn and Mr Glenn Lawler) eleven beautifully attired children, complete with flowing veils, entered Sacred Heart Church at 10am on June 5<sup>th</sup>. It was their First Communion Day. They came from Bamaga, Hammond Island and Thursday Island.

They were Jodie Brown, Pele Sebasio, Angela Sykes, Motulu Nai, David Garnier, Nancy Mosby, Letoya Nakata, Joseph Cowley, Cessa Mills, Edith Dorante and Maria Pearson. A delightful duo was rendered by Joseph Cowley and David Garnier. After the mass the First Communicants

strewn petals from their decorative baskets as they took part in the large procession held in honour of Corpus Christi. The procession was led by drummers and singing by all. On the return to the church grounds the Benediction was given from an altar in the grounds. A special feast was arranged for the first communicants as well as a meal for all who attended. In all a wonderful day for the Catholics of TI.



EXTRACT FROM M.J. O'RILEY

The above extract is from the *Torres News* of June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1988. Note that it makes the claim that this was the first time a Catholic procession had progressed through the streets of Thursday Island. The beautiful sketch of the church is taken from a short tourist note in the *Torres News* of October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1988.

## Aboriginal and Islander promotion

### ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER WEEK AT SACRED HEART

This week Sacred Heart students are participating in Aboriginal and Islander Week. They have a display of books, posters and artifacts in their library and have entered posters in a competition conducted by the Catholic Education Office in Cairns. On Wednesday there will be a prayer service to celebrate the week.

The students are delighted to begin their holidays on Friday when they have an extra day in honour of the Centenary of the Sisters of Mercy in the Cairns Dioceses.

The year seven students at Sacred Heart School told *Torres News* this week how much they enjoyed the opening of the Cultural Centre at the High School. After visiting the High School they made a short visit to the Cultural Festival. The students said they were impressed by how well the huts were built and planned and particularly liked the way they were built out of native materials.

Stalls selling local artifacts and food, music, story telling, and meeting people kept them very busy. The students wish to express their congratulations to the organizers.

Through the 1980s there continues to be an emphasis, both in the school and on T.I. generally, of promoting the importance of the indigenous culture of the Torres Straits.

“Aboriginal and Islander Week” had become a feature of the year’s calendar, and in 1988 the Convent school was an active participant as the facsimile from the *Torres News* of September 9<sup>th</sup> tells.

Indeed in the issue of October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1988, there was mention of a new education policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

<sup>6</sup> *Torres News*, February 19<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, June 10<sup>th</sup>.



## More from 1988

Robert Hayles joined the school staff in September. And in October there was a Garden Party at which Caroline Beecham rendered a solo on her cello as well as a duet with violinist Gillian Kennedy.<sup>8</sup> Seaman Dan sang his latest composition, a welcome song for his Hula Dancers. Dainty ballerinas from the Dendras School of Dancing performed, and the children of OLSH school sang and danced.

The year ended with a concert which included a Nativity play presented by the Grade Ones. The *Torres News* report suggested that, “*Peter Joseph See Kee was oblivious to the singing by the surrounding angels, wise Kings and Shepherds, as he impersonated the child Jesus.*”<sup>9</sup>

At the Graduation Mass of the Year 7s the Grade Ones presented each with a bouquet of flowers as a symbol of their leaving for High School studies.

## 1992 Mabo decision

Affecting many of the families and children at the school in 1992 was the High Court decision known as the Eddie Mabo judgement. There was great pride that a “local” man had challenged a preconception held in Australian law up to that time -- that the territories annexed by the British crown in 1770 were “terra nullius”, meaning that no one live there – and *won!!* As time went by, “Mabo Day” was celebrated on Thursday Island with a procession, speeches and celebration.

## Promotion of Islander identity

Another Statement on Catholic Education and Aboriginal Educational Policy was made by the State Catholic Education Office in 1993<sup>10</sup>:

*“Catholic Education Queensland is committed to promoting mutual understanding, respect and reconciliation between the Aboriginal people the Torres Strait Islander people, and the wider society.*

*CONSEQUENCES: \* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are to be provided with an education which acknowledges and promotes their identity, respects their cultural and spiritual values and tradition and empowers them to become equal participants in Australian society.*

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, did not need this reminder as it had been positively promoting Islander identity for at least two decades previously. The accompanying photo clearly shows participation in the Torres Strait cultural customs and festivities. Walking beside the children is Delia O'Donnell.



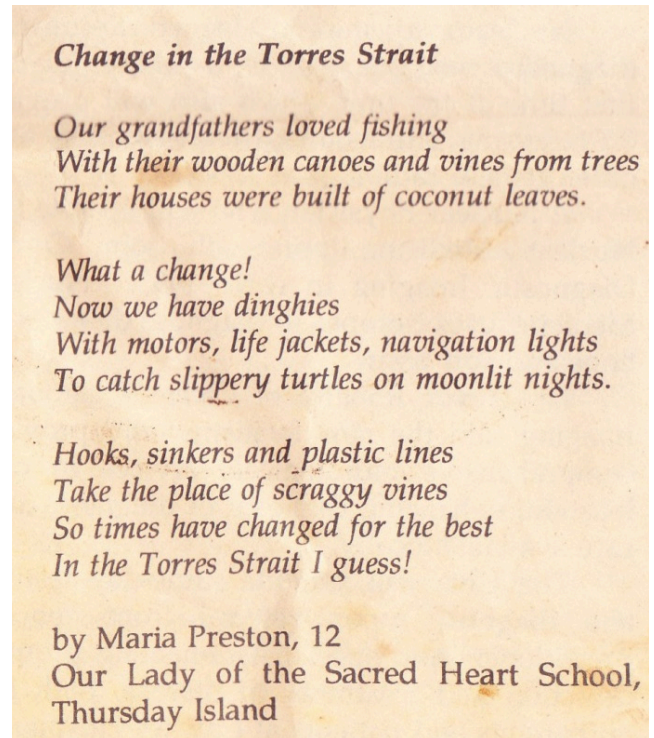
<sup>8</sup> From Gwen's Pen, *Torres News*, October 14<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> *Torres News*, November 25<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> A700, box 1, folder 11.

## Poetry Award, 1992

Maria Pearson won the Queensland section of the Dorothy MacKellar Poetry competition for Schools in 1992, and came second nationally. (Note that in the press extracts Maria's name is erroneously given as Preston) Her poem may be seen as a child's recognition of change and the ability of folk in the Torres Strait to adapt and choose amongst the facilities offered by the developed, modern world.



Sister Patricia Butterfield was the one to inspire poetic expression in the children at this time. She wrote<sup>11</sup>:

*"I was a class teacher for one or two years after Delia O'Donnell arrived. Then I was full time E.S.L. teacher. I was successful in obtaining an E.S.L. Diploma from the London College. I found this work most rewarding as the pupils improved their literacy and numeracy skills. Delia encouraged me to give a weekly Session long before the Literary Competition came around to those pupils who had an interest in, or a flair for poetry. I was often fascinated by the pupils' unique way of expressing their thoughts through this genre. A yearly competition, called 'Literary Awards' was offered in the Catholic Leader. In different years Maria Pearson and Kimberley Fujii won First Places."*

## Starting of the Wongai Ball, 1989

An important initiative taken by Delia O'Donnell and the P&F of the time, under the Presidency of Chi Chi Fujii, was the conducting, in 1989, of the first Wongai Ball. The idea was to have something substantial as a fund-raiser for the school at the same time as a way of getting a lot of people on-side in a joint enterprise. Robyn See Kee organized the food. It turned out to be an enormous success and has become an essential part of the school – and Thursday Island – calendar every year since. So the 2012 Ball will be the 23rd.

## Fond Farewell to the Sisters of Mercy

In her letter to the Parishioners<sup>12</sup> of the Sacred Heart Mission at the end of 1994, Sister Margaret Rush, by that time Superior General of the Sisters (the reader will recall that Sister Margaret – Matthew, then – was amongst the first Sisters on T.I. in 1968), mentioned that, *"Like all Religious Congregations, we, too, are experiencing the effects of the ageing of Sisters as well as the decrease in the number of people entering Religious Life."* And in a letter to the Parish Priest<sup>13</sup> at the same time Sister stressed: *"... I would like to iterate that we are leaving because of the unavailability of Sisters."*

<sup>11</sup> Written memoir, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Cairns Diocese Archives

<sup>13</sup> Cairns Diocese Archives



Finally the opportunity to say a big Thank You to the Sisters came. A great party with an enormous spread was held in the school Hall and a very emotional time was experienced by all in finally accepting that they were saying Goodbye.

In her farewell letter to the Parishoners Sister Margaret added:

*"Our withdrawal will mark the end of twenty-seven (27) years on Thursday Island and Hammond Island. During these years, all the Sisters fortunate enough to be selected to work there experienced your tremendous support, loyalty and love. We have always felt part of the Family of the Torres Strait Islanders, savouring your culture and we appreciated being 'at home' among you. For this we are deeply grateful.*

*"While on T.I., we made great and lasting friendships. There was a real sense of bonding between you and the Sisters. Allowing us to be part of your life was a very enriching experience for us. It was, indeed, a sacred time; one that has been blessed in many ways.*

*"We will carry fond memories of our time with you as we close this Chapter of our history of the Mercy Sisters in the Torres Straits. But I assure you that you will be dear to our hearts and remembered in our prayers."*



The Thank You-s and Farewells culminated at the wharf where dark glasses and tissues-on-the-ready were the order of the day, as many tears were shed, while the singing of "Yawo" was punctuated by sobs. The affection with which the Sisters were held was obvious.

And so an "era" in the life of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School drew to a close.

The Mercy Sisters who ministered on Thursday Island were:

Sr. Mary Ormond	Sr. M. Paul	Sr. Elva Russell	
Sr. Maureen Russell	Sr. M. Columbiere	Sr. M. Anne	Sr. M. Cecilia
Sr. Mary Schmid	Sr. Anne Maree	Sr. Margaret Rush	Sr. Cheryl Fulton
Sr. Joanne Steele	Sr. Patricia Butterfield	Sr. Mary Raphael	Sr. Monica Murray
Sr. M. Consilia	Sr. Marie Masterson	Sr. Rovena Duffy	Sr. Irene Masterson



(Photo showing many of the Sisters of Mercy who taught on T.I. with Mother General, Sister Oliver:

Back row: Sisters Columbiere, Anne, Anne Maree, Cheryl, Joan  
2<sup>nd</sup> row: Sisters Oliver, Maureen, Matthew (Margaret)  
Front row: Sisters Patricia, Raphael, Joan, Loyola, Rovena.)



## CHAPTER 31

### The contribution of the Patrician Brothers



The following information has been largely taken from the History of the Patrician Brothers in Australia, pages 230-232.

*“The initiative for Thursday Island came from our General Chapter of 1992 which, among other things, asked the Brothers ... to examine closely the ministries and places we were involved in and see if the work being done could be done equally well by others. If that was so, then to look at the possibility of redirecting some Brothers to areas of greater need.”* (Brother Paul O’Keefe)

In the ministry of education, this mission to Thursday Island was the most radical endeavour since 1968 when two Brothers made their way to Aitape, Papua New Guinea, for the first time. Brothers Paul O’Keefe, Philip Turner and John Robinson were the main force behind the proposal. They were all young and full of vitality and ready to respond to the challenge of the General Chapter. And they needed youth and venture but believed it required complete investigation and careful consideration which included consulting all the Brothers of the Province.

(The photo shows Brothers Joseph Guidera and Paul O’Keefe standing above their Thursday Island home and school)



There were three locations the Brothers could have gone: Walgett in New South Wales, Thursday Island in Queensland, and Daly River in the Northern Territory. The main issues were that the Mission had to be in Australia, preferably involving indigenous people; that the Brothers could respond to a real need; that the Brothers would not be too isolated from the rest of the Province; that existing communities and schools would not be unduly affected; and that Papua New Guinean Brothers could be involved in the project.

In the end it was Thursday Island that best fit with these parameters. It was certainly not a perfect fit, and certainly not all the Brothers of

the Province agreed with the move; but there was a need at Thursday Island the Brothers could respond to and it was felt that there was sufficient support and faith for the endeavour to succeed over a four year commitment. Those Brothers who disagreed with the venture were still willing to support it in any way they felt they could if the Provincial Council decided to go ahead.

And so on Sunday, 22 January 1995, Brothers Paul O’Keefe and Joseph Guidera flew out of Sydney for Thursday Island. Paul was to be Principal of the Primary School there: he was on a four year contract with the Cairns CEO. Joseph was to offer community support.

In a 1998 edition of the Cairns Catholic School News, there was an article entitled “Australia’s Top Catholic School” referring to the Sacred Heart Primary School of which Paul was Principal. While there is no doubt that under Paul’s Principalship the school would have been doing very well, “Top” really referred to the geographical location of the school: it is the northern-most catholic school in Australia situated as it is on an island in the Torres Strait at the north-western tip of the state of Queensland. Despite being one of the smallest islands in a cluster of nine, with a population of 5,000, Thursday Island is the most heavily populated.

(The photo of the nine Brothers shows those who gathered on T.I. in 2003 for an Extended Council Meeting of the Congregation. They were not all on the staff!)

In 1995 Sacred Heart Primary School had a student population of ninety-one students, most of whom were local indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait island children. A primary Catholic school had existed on the island since 1887 with the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (1897-1968) and then the Cairns Mercy Sisters (1968-1988) administering the school. Paul took over as Principal from Miss Delia O'Donnell (1988-1994) who resigned to take on further studies. The Brothers moved into what was once the convent, adjacent to the church and school.

(The photo of the Brother with children is Brother Paul O'Keefe and Sacred Heart students in 1996.)



Paul noted by mind-1995 that the Thursday Island (T.I.) "assignment was his most difficult yet" but that he was in no way regretful about taking it on. The main difficulties were the behavior of some of the children, the youth and inexperience and transient nature of the staff, and the limited avenues of recreation.



In 1996 three Brothers ministered at T.I., Paul in the school and Joseph and Cronan O'Meara, who were both well and truly into their "retirement" years, helping out in the school and parish in any way they could. In May of 1998 Paul was joined in the school by Brother Thomas Rice. In August of 1998 Paul was elected Provincial, however he remained on T.I. until the end of that year. In December Paul handed over the Principalship to Mrs. Carmel Rossman and returned to Sydney, well pleased with what he had been able to achieve, especially the re-

establishment of an infants' school on nearby Hammond Island so that very young children did not have to make the sometimes rather hazardous ferry ride across the channel to T.I.



(The photo with three panels shows Br. Cronan O'Meara sharing nature with some young minds; Br. Thomas Rice keeping things happy at the retirement home; and Cronan and Br. Benedict Olsen always providing a touch of hospitality for the visitor.)

Thomas remained in the school until the end of 2000 when he moved into parish work. With the support of Cronan, Thomas contributed significantly to parish life on T.I. including visiting the local retirement home, running retreats, sacramental programmes, parish fetes and anything else which required his exceptional managerial and energy levels. His artistic abilities helped brighten drab sheds in the yard of the Brothers' house with bright animal and bird paintings. These will be remembered by many children as part of their schooldays experience.





Thomas left T.I. at the end of 2002 to assist with the Formation Programme taking place at Aitape, Papua New Guinea.

Once Thomas moved on to PNG this left only Cronan as a full-time member of the T.I. Patrician community. The Brothers' position in the Mission was tenuous and departure seemed imminent. However extended visits by Brother Benedict Olsen in 2003 and 2004 and long visits by other Brothers and friends kept the hope alive. And hopes were very much raised when

Brother Patrick O'Neill came to T.I. on loan from Ireland. But it was not to be. On 11 November 2005 Provincial Aengus Kavanagh wrote to Bishop Foley, the Bishop of Cairns, to inform him that regrettably the Brothers would be withdrawing from T.I. at the end of the year.

Thursday Island was perhaps a venture – a dream – that came too late: there were just not the Brothers any more to sustain an active community on T.I. Understandably, Papua New Guinea, with its new push into vocations and formation was a priority, and any Brothers who had the necessary skills and drive were directed there – both Paul O'Keefe and Thomas Rice are ministering there today [get date]. However it should be noted that the original intention was to limit the Brothers' time on T.I. to just four years while Paul was Principal. Stretching that commitment to eleven years was certainly exceeding anyone's initial expectations of the Mission.



(The photo of the five Brothers are those who ministered full time: Paul O'Keefe, Joseph Guidera, Cronan O'Meara, Thomas Rice and Patrick O'Neill.)

In those eleven years five Brothers in all ministered full-time on T.I., Cronan being the longest serving with nine years' involvement with the school parish and community. Bishop Foley described Cronan as having "been the mainstay of the place and always a great host at the times I have visited." But certainly it was a place much visited and enjoyed, and was even one of the venues of the 2003 Extended Council meeting. Three Brothers from Papua New Guinea spent time on T.I. for community experience, an experience much appreciated by the Brothers themselves and the local people.

In his 2005 farewell message to the people of Thursday island, written in his November chilly study in Dublin, Ireland, while he prepared himself for formation work in Papua New Guinea, Paul O'Keefe expresses deep and sincere gratitude to the many people who helped the Brothers along the way, with special thanks to Bishop Foley, and Fathers Woitech, Neil, Barry, Hilary and Tom. The final words of the message were: *"Please accept the profound and humble thanks of a group of men who have been privileged to be touched by the people and culture of a most beautiful part of Australia. ... **Mina big esso na yawo.**"*

Speaking to Br. Barry in July, 2011, Brother Paul expanded on the few words in the above account. He mentioned that the younger children were compliant and willing to learn but that the older children were easily distracted and it was difficult to get them to take an interest in learning. Some made life difficult for young teachers, telling them, "You not boss! Bro Paul – he boss!"

Paul recalls changing the uniform from the girls' red check dress and also the introduction of a new badge/logo featuring the Thursday Island pigeon. Not only did the Brothers take the children for picnics but also arranged camps.







## CHAPTER 32

### Hammond Island Campus, 1995-2012

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#### Survey to see if resumption of school on Hammond Island may be possible, 1987

Sister Elizabeth Jordan was asked to survey the people of Hammond Island about the possibility of re-establishing a school. Mr. Joe David on behalf of the people of Hammond Island had written to the Catholic Education Office, Cairns, and to Bishop John Bathersby, Bishop of Cairns, requesting that a Primary School be re-established on Hammond Island. Part of the reply from the Catholic Education Office was the remark that if that were to go ahead, two years advance notice would need to be given to the Federal Department of Education if funding were to be provided. *“This would mean that the school could not reopen before 1990.”*<sup>1</sup>

#### Campus established on Hammond Island, 1995

When Brother Paul O’Keeffe assumed the principalship of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, Delia O’Donnell, the retiring Principal was asked if she would go to Hammond Island to begin a school there as a Campus to OLSH, T.I. This she did with the assistance of Christine Benjamin as School Officer.

In primitive conditions Delia and Christine began in the grand old stone church on the hill, using the church furniture as desks or chairs and improvising as best they could. There was just the one teacher and one School Officer.

Hammond Island residents of the time were full of praise for the way Delia O’Donnell entered into all church and community matters, assisting with cleaning the church and presbytery and with music, and the preparations for the Crowning of Our Lady. She was *“marvelous ... helping us in any way,”* said one. Adding: *“The kids really missed her,”* when she eventually finished her time on Hammond. Another confirmed that Delia was, *“really good with the kids ... and with the community.”* Brian Arndt paid the following tribute to Delia:

*“Delia O’Donnell played a pivotal role in establishing the school back on Hammond Island. That was because she became part of the community and so earned the respect of the community. The children really loved her and because she involved herself in all aspects of community life and her happy friendly and caring nature she got on especially well with the mums and Akas of the children she taught. She was treated like family on Hammond Island and not as just an outside school teacher.”*

(Photo shows Delia O’Donnell on the occasion of a Farewell morning tea with Carmilla Sabatino Snr.)



As time went on following the simple beginnings, things improved. New water tanks were being installed in February, 1988, and a fence erected around the school perimeter as well as shade cloth put up. A Meeting was called also by Brother Paul for all those parents with children from Hammond Island attending both the Hammond Island and T.I. campuses *“to discuss your contribution to the school for the 1998 school year.”*

In the final Newsletter for the year it is announced that classes for 1999: *“Hammond Island will remain as it is with Preschool, Year 1 and Year 2.”* There was the mention, too, that on Wed 25 Nov at 10.30am there would be the *“Hammond Island Campus Concert.”* And on Thurs 3 Dec: *“Hammond Island Campus Picnic.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Letters from Presbytery Archives, Thursday Island.

## Snippets in the School Newsletter



As the campus moved into the twenty-first century there were regular reports of the doings of the Hammond Island Campus in the School Newsletter.

21<sup>st</sup> October, 2003: *"There are few opportunities to have the whole school together, as in Hammond Island and Thursday Island students. Last week provided us with such an occasion. The students shared swimming activities and the sausage sizzle."*

And at the end of 2003 it was anticipated that in the New Year of 2004 that there would be a very welcome intake of eight preschoolers.

## 2007 snippets

During March of 2007 Preps and Year 1s were concentrating on the letter "m", talking about shapes and making kites. And interestingly, *"In Maths, we have made a book about different ways to make ten and have done a lot of addition, including adding up money for our "Positive Behaviour Shop".* There was also fitness with Auntie Nan, who awarded a weekly sports award.

In May Nathan Bob wrote a short article about "ghost nets" following a walk along the beach with Uncle Furdan Judith and Auntie Ellis. At another time there was a talk about the red-back spider and snakes as a caution to safety. There was also participation in the Blessing of the Tools on the feast of St. Joseph, *"as well as a huge feast."*

The trip to T.I. can be read in the attached box.

### Hammond Island Campus

We have recently been on two excursions to T.I. On Friday we went to the "Gab Titui" to see different artwork and learn about the pearling days. Then we looked at our own artwork on display for the school's Art Show. On Monday we spent time with the T.I. Campus children and watched a Life Education DVD called "The Wonders of Life". Please keep Patimah Bowie and Nathan Bob in your prayers as they will be making their First Holy Communion on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June.

Ms Neil, Mrs Benjamin and the Hammond Island Children

The Under 8's travelled to T.I. for the many fun activities arranged in ANZAC Park. In August there was a visit by Father Mullins who gave a talk about Saint Augustine and his mother, Saint Monica.

### My Island Home

Crystal blue, shining water, colliding against the dinghies.  
Lines getting thrown into the shivering ocean.  
Fish jumping up, out of the sea  
Navy boats coming into the wharf.  
Ladies sitting in front of old  
Mona's Bazaar, chatting away.  
Children playing in sandals  
Boys fishing from the jetty,  
Their catch of the day-  
Big snappers thumping on the cracked, steamy, cement.  
Heavy water drops gushing over the tall island waterfall.  
Sand crabs eating sand as they should.  
Men cooking nice kup muri.  
Nanas singing, island dancing, stomping on the old wooden floors.  
Kids jumping off the small wharf with a big splash.  
I hear little insects making buzzing sounds in the bush.  
Relaxing on the hot, silk sand.  
This is my Island home. By Kadisha Surha

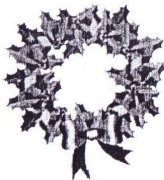
Towards the end of 2007 news came that Kadisha Surha had been Highly Commended for her entry into the 2007 Literacy Competition with her poem "My Island Home".

It is reproduced here. Kadisha and her mother were given the opportunity to fly to Brisbane for the presentation ceremony.



## Glimpse of 2008

Twelve children made up the population of the Hammond Island Campus in 2008; six in Prep and two children in each of Years 1, 2 and 3. A photo shows the children and part of the mural on the school wall. Belinda Pearson was the

What we have liked about school ~ the Hammond Stars			
<p><i>We asked some of our Hammond students to comment on some of the things they had enjoyed doing this year and this is what they said:</i></p> <p>I liked doing the dinghy race on the computer  <b>Jayden Year 1</b></p> <p>I liked playing on the computers in activity time</p>	<p><b>Juan Year 2</b></p> <p>I liked when we walked down to the oval to practice our running races.</p> <p><b>Tyrese Prep</b></p>	<p>corner with the Preps.  <b>Jade Year 3</b></p>	
			
	<p>I liked swimming in the deep water at swimming lessons  <b>Serianne Prep</b></p>		
	<p>I like playing in the home</p>		



teacher for Prep –Year 3 and Beauty Pearson was the School Officer.

In Term 4, 2008, came the news “Pre-Prep comes to Hammond Campus”. The Newsletter stated:

*“We are now very excited by the prospect of having up to eight pre-preps for 2009. This means our Hammond class numbers have finally reached the twenty mark. This is an important growth for our whole school community. ... Congratulations to the Hammond community for being so supportive and pro-active in developing our Hammond campus.”*

In October, 2008, a Meeting was called at Hammond Island, “...to look at directions for the campus on Hammond and the development of the school.”

At the end of 2008 there was a working bee to tidy the school for the end of the year and children were asked what they enjoyed during the year. Some results are reproduced here.

## 2009 highlights

Prep-3 was taken by Deidre Lawlor with Dorothy Cowley as Aide while Leonie Snowdon took Pre-Prep with Beauty Pearson as Aide. After Term 1, Belinda Pearson took over the Pre-Preps.

July: “School Development Meeting – Hammond Campus: This morning [17<sup>th</sup> July] we had a very successful Hammond Campus parent meeting. We were looking at school development ideas, needs and future planning for the campus. We had 10 people at the meeting and many positive and exciting ideas were discussed and considered.”

In October, 2009 we read: “The new playground over on Hammond has been approved for construction and will also hopefully be up before the end of term. We have also approved construction of a door from the classroom into the old storeroom at Hammond so they can use it as a learning support area.”

12<sup>th</sup> November: “A special morning for our Pre Prep children for 2010 will be held at the school next Wednesday from 8.30-10.30am. They will need to bring along a piece of fruit, a drink bottle and a hat. Parents are invited to morning tea at 10.30. The End of Year Liturgy and Concert will be held next Thursday evening commencing at 5.30 in the church. We will be having a Prayer Liturgy followed by a



*shared meal at the school. Everyone is asked to bring along a plate to share. Our concert will commence at 7pm. The children have been working hard on their concert items."*



An important decision for the Hammond Island community was the unanimous support for starting a Pre-Prep on Hammond in 2009. Those on T.I. asking if a Pre-Prep was planned were told that, *"If families see this as a need, we need to have names of potential pre-preps so I can inform the CES and they can make a decision one way or the other."*

### 2010 and big news

In 2010 Hammond Island Campus had two full-time teachers for the first time as the numbers were growing. Deidre Lawlor taught Pre Prep/Prep and Brendon Lawlor taught 1-3, while Salluen Dorante was School Officer, and Aide, Shakira Weston. Bernadine David replaced Shakira in March.

(Photo shows Josephine David-Petero and artist, Nino Sabatino with the children)

The School Sports Carnival of 2010 saw the Thursday Island Campus visit Hammond Island to contest the sports. This had previously been a long tradition, and many reports of such Sports days are recorded in the *Torres News* in the 1950s and 1960s.





## NAIDOC on Hammond Island, 2010

The whole school assembled on Hammond Island for NAIDOC Week celebrations in 2010.



(Photos show children learning palm frond weaving and also the assembly in the Hammond Island church for prayer; and the whole assembly of elders and all children and teachers outside the historic church.)

## 2011-2012

School continues vigorously at the time of the Jubilee with teachers Mrs Gayle Frank and Mrs Josephine David-Petero and with Bernadine David and Saulluer Dorante (till March 2012) as School Officers. Trish Crilly taught Pre-Prep/Prep from January to June, 2011. Kerrie Anne Sabatino came in from March, 2012, onwards as School Officer, joining Bernadine David who was continuing.

During 2011 there was the filming of a television mini-series called *The Straits*, with some of the scenes being filmed on Hammond Island. During a break in filming, and while the staff and children were having a party for one of the staff it was noticed that the Australian actress, Rachel Ward was resting under a tree. She was called over and invited to join the party. One photo is of the children with her. They delighted her with singing a song for her! The other photo shows them waving Goodbye.



And so the Hammond Island Campus in 2012 continues to happily flourish.

(Photo shows the children with a visiting parent, back left, and actress, Rachel Ward, back right.)





## CHAPTER 33

### School Life and changes, 1995 to 2000

#### Brother Paul O’Keeffe becomes Principal, 1995

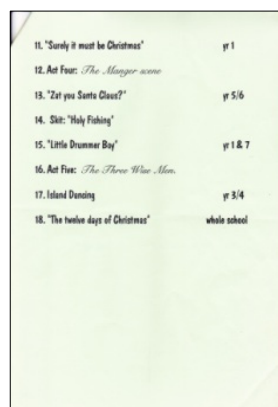
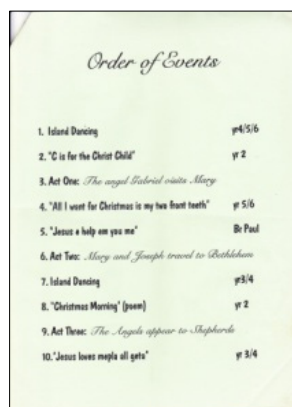
In 1995 Patrician Brother, Paul O’Keeffe, became Principal of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School. Brother Paul was greatly respected and had a special ability to encourage his staff, making daily classroom visits and openly showing his appreciation for their efforts and achievements. He led by example and was welcoming of all ... all denominations and lifestyles. He was very family orientated. Brother Paul had a “presence” along with a sense of humour.<sup>1</sup> Paul had a very good relationship with the children, often spending time with them during recreation breaks. He was said to be “*on the ball with the kids.*”



Brother Paul, also, placed special emphasis on the nurturing of knowledge of and respect for the indigenous culture of the Torres Strait. In the Graduation ceremonies, prompted by Year 7 teacher, Terri Delanty, he organised for the Year 7s he introduced traditional dress as part of the festivities. And so the boys were dressed in the blue lava lava and the girls in bright floral dresses. In the accompanying photos from 1995 can also be seen the new school crest being carried. It prominently featured a Torres Strait pigeon surrounded by the dhari, the traditional Torres Strait headdress. This was the first time that any reference to the school being situated in the Torres

Strait was recognised in the school crest. The crest was designed by the students themselves in a design competition. The finished product was professionally drawn by artist Mario Assan of Hammond Island and thereafter used on the new school and sports uniforms.

At the time of Christine Benjamin’s 25<sup>th</sup> Jubilee of work in Catholic Education in the Cairns Diocese in 2012 Br. Paul paid tribute to Christine’s enormous help at the time in assisting him settle in and understand the island, its people and the children.



Christine virtually became his personal assistant as School Officer, and with enormous discretion and compassion was able to alert Br. Paul to which families were doing it tough and needed special concessions and assistance etc.<sup>2</sup>

Tony Tulacz recalls that there was a great deal of socialising between Teachers, Parish Priest and Patrician

<sup>1</sup> Comments taken from colleagues’ conversations with Brother Barry in 2011, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Br. Paul read at this ceremony in 2012.



Brothers. Great use was made of a boat, appropriately named the “Daniel Delaney” (the founder of the Patrician Brothers), for fishing and recreational expeditions, further bonding the staff and Parish Priest. Father Barry Craig, when Parish Priest, proved to be a wizard with the spear, and many a pleasant feasting on the crays that he speared were the result of these outings.



The obvious interest of Brother Paul, Father Wojciech and other staff in fishing, led to a skit in the school concert of one year that featured the *Daniel Delaney* and a cheeky boy, Sorogo Mills, taking the part of Father Wojciech.



It was in 1996 that the Tulacz joined the staff, bringing with them extensive experience working within an indigenous environment. Tony had previously been a Principal at a Queensland Government school and Sylvie with a background as a Special Needs Teacher became, also, responsible for ESL (English as a Second Language) and IT (Information Technology). Tony became Assistant Principal Religious Education (APRE).

(Class photos show Miss Vanessa Crowdey in the top photo and Mrs Marie Sabatino and Miss Kathleen Mulligan in the lower photo)

Tony Tulacz did more than just classroom teaching and was very active in any Parents & Friends working bees. A particular project that he saw through with great persistence over a long time was the clarification of the school boundary facing Chester Street. It was found that an area bordering Chester Street might be able to be declared school property and the fence/border moved closer to the edge of the road, affording more playground space. Applications were properly lodged, and a sign displayed for a statutory period etc. and these long and exasperating negotiations with the various relevant authorities eventually saw this advantage to the school acquired.

## Technology and computers

At this time grants were obtained that allowed for all classrooms to get access to computers<sup>3</sup>, educational software and the internet. With assistance from Frank



Sawyer the first IT network was installed and digital portfolios for students at the school were introduced. Computer use was taught either via Special Needs students who then passed on their new skills to their home classroom, or via direct class lessons. Gifted students had access to individualised Mathematics lessons, Music taught included Music Theory and Indigenous songs, instruments and dances, and Art classes drew on cultural knowledge skills of Indigenous Community Members.

<sup>3</sup> Information based on a memoir Tony Tulacz wrote in 2011.



## Visitors, Island greetings, displays of culture and prize-winning song

T.I. saw the arrival of numerous special visitors including Prime Minister John Howard, Governor General, Sir William Deane, the Brisbane Broncos and the Cairns Taipans. Occasionally the students would welcome these visitors at the wharf with dancing and song, much to their surprise and delight. Excursions of students to the mainland displaying Island culture were an annual feature of these years. Tony Tulacz recalls<sup>4</sup>:

*“As most Australians are not very familiar with Torres Strait Islander people and their culture, every year I managed to secure grants to fly a group of students to the mainland, taking with us the Torres Story and telling it through traditional song and dance. To the delight of audiences, the students put on performances in schools from Mossman in North Queensland to The Gold Coast in the South, bringing another aspect of Indigenous Australia to the consciousness of fellow Australians. Community Elders like Bua Mabo and his wife, Akoko, as well as the Mills Sisters assisted with the preparations, programs and performances and ensured their authenticity.”*



*basis as it won the \$1000 first prize. We also entered “Tournament of Minds” which reached the Finals.”*

*“One year we were able to obtain a PCAP (Priority Country Area Program) Grant with which we bought a number of musical instruments and established a band so that students could practise their musical talents. We entered a competition organised by Quarantine Australia, the students wrote a song entitled “Top Watch Team” which was played on the radio on a daily*

Some students had never been to a city before and were intrigued by the escalator and traffic lights. And because a cinema with its central aisle and ranks of seats on each side had the structure of a church, some students genuflected as they approached their seat. Margaret SeeKee remembers starting fundraising for these excursions, *“on the first day of school,”* at one stage raising \$8,000 to take the children to the Gold Coast.

As a teacher Tony Tulacz had an engaging way with his classes<sup>5</sup>, regaling them with many stories of his extraordinary adventures from catching record black marlin, surviving plane crashes, boat wrecks and near drowning and other deeds of bravado, daring and derring-do which *“kept the children enthralled and on task for the whole day.”*

Occasionally at this time different Patrician Brothers would visit T.I. and they might be recruited to give a talk to the children. One such was Brother Philip Akayawo who spoke about Papua New Guinea. The photo shows a *blackboard* ... something that went out of favour in years following, replaced by whiteboards.



Brother Thomas (pictured), who had Grade Four, was very creative and encouraged creativity in his students. Tom designed and painted the sets for plays and the musical with the assistance of Brother Cronan and various older students. He took a great interest in Island culture and learned the native songs which he sang lustily with an Irish accent. He had lots of energy, a characteristic that rubbed off on the children, all of whom were treated exactly the same.<sup>6</sup> So organized was Brother Thomas that it was believed that if he had been taken sick he was “so organized” that his lesson plans



<sup>4</sup> Taken from same memoir.

<sup>5</sup> Memoir of Melissa Lovejoy who worked with Tony as an Aide in those days.

<sup>6</sup> A colleague’s memory of Brother Toms’ manner.

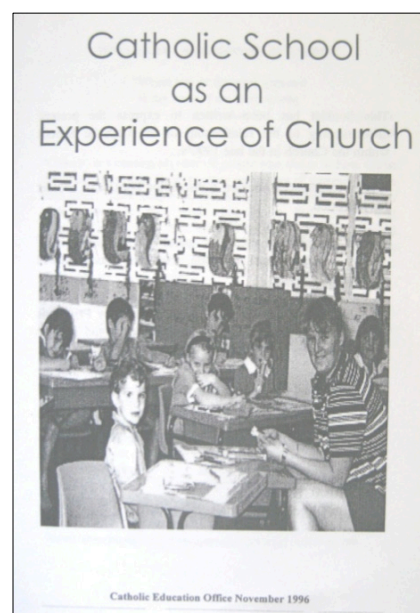
could have guided a replacement teacher for two or three weeks.<sup>7</sup> He spent much time preparing individualized tasks for particular pupils. Described as a “top guy” by a parent of the time, Brother Thomas was remembered as one who would do the “back-breaking physical work” in many odd-jobs around the school that needed to be done. He is remembered as having, “*painted the convent and the presbytery both inside and out.*”

Melissa Lovejoy, in her years as Teacher’s Aide, before going on to her teaching degree and subsequent life of teaching, recalls Father Hilary Flynn, occasionally dropping in to the Lovejoy household for a meal and a yarn. “*Those are the memories I hold most dear*”, she wrote in a memoir, “*the social interaction amongst school staff, local friends and other government workers. We were all on the island to provide a service and had so much fun doing it.*” She attests that the several years her young son, Elliott, attended Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School were most beneficial: “*We are grateful that our son Elliott grew up in his formative years on the island, accepting cultural differences in his stride and grounding him in a cross-cultural experience few others can boast.*” Melissa deliberately learned Creole at the TAFE to be more in touch with Islander culture, and the children were surprised and delighted when she spoke Creole with them.

### 1996, Statement on inclusion

Catholic teachers, and particularly those responsible for Catholic Education generally (eg. Catholic Education Offices) often agonise over the best way to bring Christ and his message to the children under their care. Sometimes they produce statements setting out general principles etc. in attempts to clarify their aims and methods.

In 1996 the Catholic Education Office of Cairns produced a very frank and insightful statement with the heading, “*Catholic School as an Experience of Church*”. It took seriously the meaning of “catholic” in the “Catholic” Church, meaning all-embracing. It acknowledged, as few such statements generally do, that there are great variations in religious belief and religious practice in the Catholic Church ... but that all those different folk are warmly embraced by Christ and the Church. Those familiar with the Catholics on T.I. would know that this brochure spoke to them.



Some quotations will give the flavour to the document:

*"This booklet has been written to express the present understanding of the relationship of the Catholic School within the Church in the late 1990's. It is an explanatory booklet, a discussion booklet, a booklet for reflection. If this booklet is used for parent information, staff discussion and personal reflection, it will have succeeded in its purpose."*

*"'Church' is a coming together of people who desire to have Christ at the centre of their lives, to enter into forms of community with each other. These people express their Christ-centredness through their celebrations, their work, their loving, their grieving and support for each other. Their life is in the world. They may belong to a worshipping, sacramental community, or they may be on a different pathway – but they still call themselves Christians because their lives are Christ centred."*

*"'Church', then, is not just for the fully committed. The latter is certainly an ideal to be aimed at, but reality paints a different picture. The reality is that there are different levels of commitment to faith in Jesus Christ and Church pastoral strategies need to reflect this range. In effect, moreover, a typical Catholic school reflects the range of faith development and so could be said to be a microcosm of this broad understanding of Church."*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Conversation of Cecilia O'Brien with Brother Barry in 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Before moving on from 1995 it may be of passing interest to the reader to note the Cairns Director's Report to Diocesan Board of Education Meeting of 5 June, 1995 by T.M Creagh : “*Just recently I have sent to Principals notification that Corporal Punishment is not to be used in our schools for any performance at all. This is in line with our Gospel Message and with present legislation.*”



## School Based Religious Education Programmes and “Perth Guidelines”

Every now and then school systems decide that programs of study should be designed by those teaching in each school and each classroom rather than teachers being obliged to follow an imposed syllabus. The mid 1990s were such a time. A booklet from the CEO, Cairns, entitled, *“Building Religious Education in 1996 – Initiatives for teachers and schools in Cairns Diocese”*, listed a number of courses, inservices and retreats that teachers may choose to attend. The same booklet announced “Project 8” was to be “Development of School Based Religious Education Programmes”. It stated: *“The aim of this project is to have each school or College develop its own school based Religious Education programme by 1997. Such development will require the co-operation of all staff members. The Principal and the A.P.R.E. (or R.E.C. as the case may be) will be responsible for the co-ordination of this project.” ... “The design of each school’s programme will be influenced by local factors...”*

In Memorandum of 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1997 Bishop James Foley stated: 1997: *“I would expect all schools and colleges to begin their implementation of the Perth RE Guidelines by the start of the 1998 school year.”* He pledges all assistance with whatever inservicing is required to facilitate its implementation. These guidelines were considered to be the most comprehensive in Australia at the time and Perth was considered to be “ahead of the field.” The Perth Guidelines provided a good mix of prayer and liturgy and combined content with suggested activities. Their worksheets were considered most practical.

## Insights into the year 1998

Thanks to the keeping of the *School Newsletters* for 1998 we know a lot about school life for that year. Brother Paul O’Keefe was Principal and began each Newsletter with a letter to Parents and Guardians.

1998 began with a school roll of 106. In his first letter Brother Paul invites all to be involved in the Parents and Friends Association. He paid tribute to Eric Mairu, the school groundsman, for winning the Schools’ Garden Competition, and announced that a Book Fair will take place.

At this time an organisation called “Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program” (ASSPA), under the guidance of Mrs. Cecelia O’Brien, was in operation. This entitled the school to attract \$215.00 for each Indigenous student. Funding of \$18,920 was received in March and a Meeting decided the money would go towards the School Magazine, emergency lunches, Year 7 excursion bus transport and the purchase of various ESL resources and education construction games, and a secondhand piano.

Another funded program was the “Homework Centre”, provided under DEETYA. This was *“to provide the facilities and supervision needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students to complete homework and school assignments, where they are not available in the students’ home.”* This program was popular amongst a range of students and attracted between 15 and 20 of an afternoon. Part of its popularity was that it was held in the only air-conditioned room in the school and that it entailed a piece of fruit and a sandwich or two as Afternoon Tea. A further program was the Priority Country Area Program (PCAP) and in April the allocation of almost \$30,000 was announced.

It was the custom for teachers to include in the Newsletter an encouraging write-up of class activities and occasionally listing the Birthdays that were occurring. A call went out from the Library in an attempt *“to make the library a fun and exciting place”*, for Boardgames, Jigsaw puzzles and Playing cards.

As Easter approached the whole school became involved in preparing and presenting *“significant events in the lead up to Jesus’ death and resurrection.”* Parents were invited to attend. On different days, at 12.30pm, the following presentations were made:

Pre/Yr 1	Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem	(Photo of Last Supper pageant, approx. 1996 with Elliott Lovejoy as Jesus)
Yr 2/3	Last supper, Arrest and Trial of Jesus	
Yr 4/5	Jesus Carries His Cross	
Yr 6/7	Jesus is Crucified	



Every year each Catholic Primary School prepares the children for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. Less common is the conferring of the Sacrament of Baptism. On T.I. in 1996 there was such a ceremony with a number of children being baptized.



The Spellathon, noted as a feature of the school in the 1980s, was clearly continuing in the 1990s. The 1998 Spellathon raised \$1,500.

(Photo shows the Baptism group with Father Hilary Flynn)

In April Brother Paul announced that he would be away for the first six weeks of Term 3 as a delegate to the Patrician Brothers' Congregation's "Chapter", which is a gathering of representatives of the Brothers from all over the world and held



every six years. His replacement for the period was Mr. Paul Daglish (pictured) from St. Thomas', Mareeba.

Nurturing a spirit of generosity and compassion, Brother Paul mentioned in his letter of 6<sup>th</sup> May:

#### Dear Parents and Caregivers

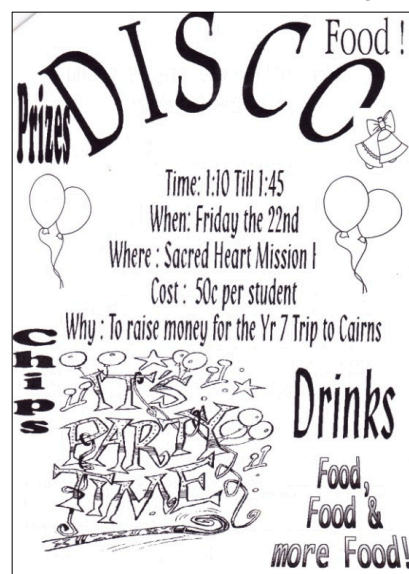
I had a letter last week from one of our parents detailing an experience of a friend of hers recently visiting Boigu Island and the Papua New Guinean villages nearby. Her friend spoke of the still evident effects of last years drought and the hard times still there. Perhaps as a school we could do something? Do you have any extra tinned food you may like to donate? Any second hand clothes you don't want? Why not send them in to school between now and Friday of next week and we'll arrange for them to get to the right people!

Br. Paul regretted in his following Newsletter that the response had been slow, so he makes another appeal, particularly for food.

Other events during 1998 included the "Under 8s Day" in the Park, a tradition that was still continuing 12 years later.

A Disco was held to raise funds for the Year 7 excursion to Cairns. In regular annual pattern, children were prepared for First Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation. Regarding First Communion in 1998 we read the names of the children followed by:

*"Many thanks to Miss Sandra Dixon for preparing the children and to Mr and Mrs Tulacz for getting the booklet ready and providing the musical accompaniment. The parents of the children helped in making the day a real celebration by decorating the verandah of the hall and providing the beautiful morning tea. Cathy Lewin is to be congratulated on the magnificent cake everyone shared in."*







Brother Thomas Rice took over the teaching of Year 4/5 during the year and Brother Malachy Corbett joined the Brothers' community for four months. There is mention of a "Combined School Fete" on Ken Brown Oval on 17<sup>th</sup> July; the School Athletics Carnival on August 14<sup>th</sup>; a Boys' and Girls' Basketball competition; NAIDOC Week including 'sausage sizzle'; Walking down to Engineers Wharf to greet the Governor General, Sir William Deane; Queensland Arts Council performance at Port Kennedy Hall and Parent/Teacher interviews. For the parents there was the Wongai Ball at the Bowls Club.

The Parents and Friends were very active at this time and one large project that they undertook was the excavation and leveling of the playing areas at Douglas Street level and the building of the walls of stone blocks. These areas were then turfed as well as the turfing of the upper school playground. Tony Tulacz, Bill Barwick and Brother Thomas were "a powerhouse" in physical tasks like this.

Brightening of the unattractive sheds in the Brothers' house with large paintings of coloured birds and animals is another legacy of Brother Thomas that many school children will remember both from his time and for a number of years to come.

A feature of Mr Paul Daglish's Newsletters, while temporally replacing Br. Paul during Term Three, was the inclusion of cartoons and illustrations into the Newsletter. His tone of constant encouragement to the children and of gratitude to helpers remained similar to Br. Paul's.

## CLASS NEWS

### Year 1 - Preschool News

Year One and Preschoolers are back into the swing of things. Continuing on the Nursery Rhymes, we have learnt Hey Diddle Diddle, Baa Baa Black Sheep, and Mary Mary Quite Contrary. We are quickly picking out the rhyming words. Last week the Year One's started to join two groups of objects together. We are now beginning to learn how to add. In religion we are looking at how brave Mary was when the Angel Gabriel told her about Jesus. Science has us looking at water and different types of liquids. Well done to all the Year One's for working hard for Br Paul and Mrs Knight last week.

### Hi from Year 2!

A lot of great things are happening in the year 2 classroom. Last Thursday we went down to visit the people at Star of the Sea. We all had lots of fun together, we did some weaving, played jigsaws and told and listened to stories. A great morning was had by all! This week we continue praying and thinking about how Jesus gave himself to us in the Eucharist. Our social skills are going strong and well. At the moment, we are looking at accepting the consequences of our actions. By accepting the

consequences of our right doings, we should be pleased with ourselves, and by accepting our consequences of our wrongdoings, this usually resolves a problem quickly.

In language, we have been working with the Year 3 class on developing a news plan which helps us with our story writing, which brings me to the topic of recounts. Together we have done an oral recount, and developed a plot profile on the story of "Little Thumb". A plot profile shows people our response to different stories read. We will soon start our new topic on flight, so till next time, sit back, work hard and keep smiling!

### Year 3 News

We hope everyone is well, enjoying the times. On Thursday we journeyed to Star of the Sea. We sang for the residents and they helped us with our Mothers Day cards.

Over the last week we have joined with Year 2 and worked on a written first steps genre, an oral language recount and a reading plot profile on the story "Little Thumb". We will conclude this week with a joint session on spelling strategies. Last Wednesday we joined with Years 4, 5, 6 and 7 in sports and look forward to these sessions from 11.30 - 1.00 every Wednesday. Congratulations to the students producing terrific homework. Remember to keep returning the signed note each Monday.

Soon after returning at the end of August Brother Paul announced that he had been elected Provincial of the Australian Patrician Brothers, to be based in Sydney. As a result he told the school community that he had submitted his resignation to be affective at the end of the 1998 school year. The talk of the school, naturally, was: who would replace Brother Paul? Brother Thomas was to remain on the teaching staff and provide some continuity of involvement of the Patrician Brothers on Thursday Island.

An interesting note in the Newsletter of 15<sup>th</sup> September stated: "*CULTURAL WEEK – Just a reminder that children can wear their island costumes this week, instead of school uniforms.*"

There was mention, too, of participation in an Island Dancing Competition at T.I. State High School and also "Sacred Heart Singers" were to perform at Mardi Gras!



Swimming lessons were organised and the statement made: *"All children are expected to take part in these swimming lessons."*

The Musical for the year was "The Wizard of Oz" and was performed in the Kennedy Hall.



On 18<sup>th</sup> November the announcement was made that Mrs Carmel Rosman from Melbourne was to be the new Principal. It only remained then for Brother Paul to thank everyone, which he did on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1998:

*Dear Parents and Caregivers*

*I would have to admit that this is the hardest newsletter I have had to write in the last four years. I really want to say THANKYOU! Even though it is only one word it means a great deal.*

*Thankyou for all the tremendous people I have met and have come to know over the last four years.*

*Thankyou for your efforts to improve what has been happening in the school and for putting the children first.*

*Thankyou for all I have learnt about the culture of the Torres Strait.*

*Thankyou for giving up your time on so many occasions again to benefit our school and the children.*

## School life in 1999

Something is learned about school life in 1999, during the period of the Principalship of Mrs Carmel Rosman, because a "Parent Information booklet" was prepared at that time. Under the heading, GOALS, we read:

*"WE AIM TO:*

*Seek truth whilst giving witness to the Christian story*

*Be a focus point/meeting place for family, school and parish*

*Be a role model for the wider community*







*Aspire to competence in Literacy and Numeracy  
Provide a broad curriculum to encourage and recognize the giftedness of each student  
Develop skills in critical thinking and the ability to make informed decisions  
Encourage appreciation of our own families and culture whilst being open-minded and respectful of other cultures, people and different paths of development.*

Carmel Rosman (pictured) was remembered for her interest in promoting indigenous culture. She was keen to consult with indigenous advisers regarding appropriate resources and sought advice on the cultural side of things. A great promoter of computers in the school, Carmel believed that the use of the computer and internet would be helpful in overcoming the isolation of indigenous children and introduce them to the wider world. As Principal, Carmel was quite passionate about promoting the school and emphasizing the quality of standards in literacy and numeracy.

An interesting feature of school in 1999 was the “HOMEWORK CENTRE”. The brochure states that the Centre is available from Monday to Thursday from 3.00-4.00pm “to enable the children to complete homework under supervision. Light refreshments are available at the end of the session.”

The school uniform gets a special mention in the brochure, stressing that it is seen to create a sense of belonging and a sense of pride. The small classes, that are a feature of Sacred Heart School, are praised:

*“The students at our school are very fortunate to be taught in small groups and have the opportunity for individual attention. We have support teachers for those with difficulties and those who need extension.”*

### High ideals and gloomy outlook

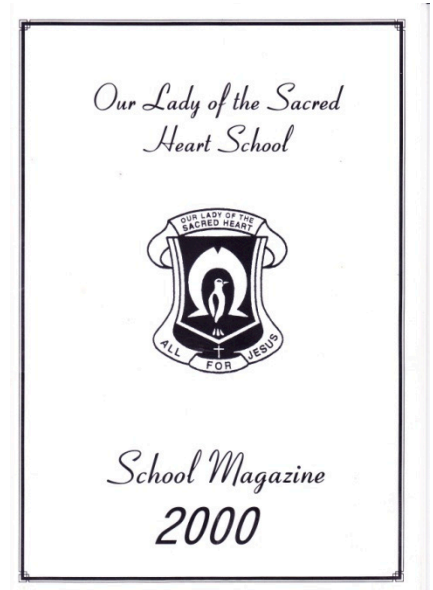
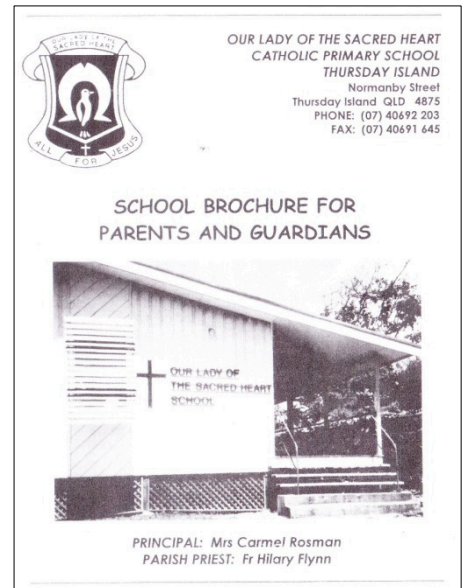
During 2000 the Catholic Education Office produced a booklet that listed the hoped-for “defining features” of Catholic Education in the Diocese. It was titled, “Diocese of Cairns Catholic Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century DEFINING FEATURES.” It declared that Catholic Schools:

*Be places of authentic evangelization where faith and life are one  
Celebrate God’s abundant and abiding presence in all creation  
Be communities sustained by life giving relationships  
Be welcoming to all who seek to share their life  
Be centres of Vital Wholistic Learning  
Be places of self-renewal and sowers of change  
Build constructive covenants with all partners*

The warm glow of these wonderful ideals was chilled somewhat with the cold breath of reality at a very big Catholic Education Conference held in Cairns in 2000 and attended by nineteen teachers and staff from OLSH School, T.I. Extensive surveys had been undertaken in preparation for the Conference and some of the findings were not joyful. In one address it was remarked that, “A close study of the focus group input in the Diocese of Cairns would indicate:

*Deep concern of the impact of:  
The decline of the traditional family  
The anti community influence of technology  
The greed and stress generated by growing materialism.”*

*“A lack of HOPE in the future was a disturbing OUTCOME – forecasts were described as “gloomy”.*



Life at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School continued nevertheless, and the happy whoops and shrieks of children in the school yard and the hum of recitations and singing practices in the classrooms showed little acknowledgement that in far-distant Cairns some believed that the world as some knew it was coming to an end.

### School Board proposed

In the School Magazine for 2000 and also in an article in the Diocesan News of August, 2000, we find mention of the establishment of a School Board. The press article quotes the Principal, Carmel Rosman, as saying,

*"We are proud of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, that we have finally formed our first School Board. It has taken twelve months to gain parent interest, pre-inservice prospective members and gain real commitment to the Board formation. It was all well worthwhile when we saw the outcome of the first meeting. We see a School Board at our School as vitally important due to the transitory nature of staff in remote areas. Having a Board will help to ensure the ongoing nature of school policies and educational standards. ... I believe that a new era is starting for our Catholic school in the Torres Strait."*

(The photo accompanying the article shows participants: Min Clarke, Fr. Hilary Flynn, Ivy Trevallion, Laura Jessop, Fred Tatipata, Subrea Assan, Katherine Presley, Carmel Rosman and Cecilia O'Brien.)

However in her comments in the School Magazine at the end of that year Carmel Rosman notes, *"The In-services we organised for parents, to form a School Board in 2001, has had mixed success. We are still waiting for parents to nominate to come on board."*

Another "Parent Information Booklet" was prepared for 2003-2004. The "School Goals 2003-2004" are stated thus:

- \* To link Faith education with the everyday life of children
- \* To improve literacy and numeracy standards
- \* To support the development of pride and ownership of the Torres Strait Islander culture.



This appears to be the first time in a school document such a prominent stress has been placed on Torres Strait Islander culture. It had been followed in practice, however, for quite a number of years. This emphasis is noted in the section of the brochure headed, "Art and Cultural Program." It states:

*"As one of our goals is to increase students' knowledge and pride in Torres Strait culture, it is important that the curriculum included focused lessons on dance, music,*

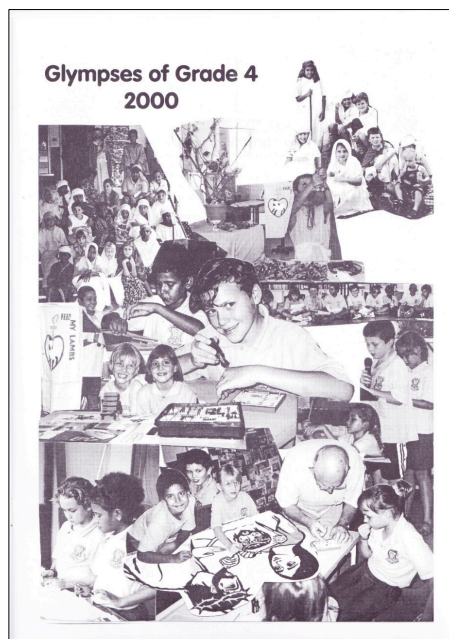
*storytelling, and visual art. To ensure that what is being taught is authentic, local indigenous community members are invited to provide advice and to lead some sessions."*

Through the 1980s, there were occasional lessons in native dance and crafts, but it was never set down as a school goal; rather it was taken for granted as an appropriate thing to do.

But we learn that some radical changes are forecast in the 2003-2004 brochure. Teaching and learning is to be bound up with students developing a:

*"sense of responsibility for their own learning, through involvement in the development of curriculum units with teachers. Students negotiate the points of interest, suggest strategies for learning and participate in assessment and reporting process."*

These and other changes are the result of the "new syllabus documents developed by the Queensland Schools Curriculum Council."





Another change, partly resulting from this new syllabus, saw a reorganisation of the grouping of children in the school:

*“To assist teachers to achieve our goal of improved literacy and numeracy outcomes, the students in stages Two and Three are tested, divided into four groups and taught in those ability groupings. The groupings are called ‘**Journey Groups**’. The title is meant to convey the idea of each student being on a learning journey which is particular to them and to the teacher who will accompany them on that ‘journey’, hopefully for two years. At the end of the year they will be re-tested and re-grouped. Each of the literacy and numeracy groups has ten to twelve students – which provides an excellent opportunity for learning.”*

### 1999, 2000 Parents and Friends

The Minutes of the Parents and Friends for the last couple of years of the twentieth century show a dedicated continuation of the work of P&Fs of previous decades. Taps were fixed, toilets cleaned, soap dispensers installed, Working Bees conducted, School camps financed and assisted, Croc Eisteddfod prepared for and an evening arranged on the topic of the internet. A particular milestone was noted in the October Minutes:

*“Carmel [Rosman, Principal] expressed thanks and appreciation to Sylvia [Tulacz] for her great work in getting our website up and running. Another great milestone for Sacred Heart.”* Much planning had gone into the Wongai Ball and it became a great success.



2000 saw another successful Working Bee and Family Disco. And Margaret See Kee got a tick of approval from a Health Department inspection of the tuckshop: *“Margaret does not need to do anything different,”* was the summary in the Minutes. Two new computers were installed in 6/7.

### Interesting excursion, 2000

Some lucky students were able to climb aboard the *Duyfken* replica when it called in to T.I. during 2000. This was a reproduction of a Dutch ship that visited the coast near present Weipa in 1606. And interestingly this was the same year – 1606 – that Luis Vaes Torres sailed through what is now known as the Torres Strait.





## CHAPTER 34

### Role of the Marist Brothers, commencing 2009

In 2009 four Marist Brothers arrived on T.I. to assist in the school and also the parish. They were Brothers Brian Tanguan from PNG, Tim Beencke from Sydney, Damien Shutt from New Zealand and Laurie Toohey from the Melbourne Province of the Brothers.



Bishop James Foley approached the Provincial of the Marist Brothers of the Sydney Province, Brother Jeff Crowe, to ask if any Brothers may be able to assist the role of the Church on T.I. and the associated churches of Hammond Island, Horn Island and Bamaga.



It was clear that Father Tom Mullins, much loved and totally dedicated pastor of the Sacred Heart Mission, was approaching retirement, and future ministry to the Catholic people of T.I. was appearing somewhat uncertain.

Several Brothers visited T.I. to survey the needs of the Catholic people and those of the youth, and they prepared a report that spoke of possible avenues of apostolate, in the school as



well as the parish and the wider community. This was at a time when the various separate administrative units of the Marist Brothers in Australia and the Pacific were on the verge of coming together. It was thought that a multi-national group would be most suitable as a community for T.I., and Brother Brian Tanguan, a PNG national, was chosen as Community Leader. It was believed that Brother Brian would easily develop a special affinity with the indigenous pupils of the school and the wider T.I. community.

(Photos show group of Brothers: Damien Shutt, Brian Tanguan, Laurie Toohey and Tim Beencke; Father Tom Mullins; Brother Hugh Reilly (with hat); and Brother Tim assisting at a school liturgy in the church.)



Initially it was envisaged that the Brothers may have a role in the school, in the parish, also in the island community, possibly, with sport and recreation for youth and maybe there could be a connection with Marist schools on the mainland by way of teacher exchanges etc.

As it turned out, circumstances altered the original personnel. Brother Hugh Reilly (pictured) replaced Brother Laurie for a period in 2010 and was appreciated in the school for his assistance to some children on a one-to-one basis, as well as entertaining story-teller to some junior classes.

Brother Brian was then recalled to a special ministry in Wewak in PNG that required his services.



By the end of 2010, however, it was just Brothers Tim and Damien remaining in the community.

Brother Tim was the Brothers' presence in the school being very busy with all manner of things, but mainly as Assistant Principal, Religious Education and computer support. Br. Tim was always relied on to set up electronic equipment: loud speakers and microphones, PowerPoint presentations, etc. "*Brother Tim knows how to do that,*" was a commonly heard phrase around the school, be it plumbing, stuck doors or windows, light fittings, flag-pole arrangements, photocopier trouble-shooting etc. Br. Tim was also to take on the role of Acting Principal whenever the occasion arose.



Brother Damien assisted in the Parish with liturgies and, when required, supported the Catholic communities at Horn Island and Bamaga with their liturgies if the priest was unavailable. Damien, also, was part of a team giving Religious Instruction in the State Primary schools, both on T.I. and on Horn Island. He was a familiar figure around the Church, Presbytery and Brothers' House keeping the grounds, gardens and lawns in neat and attractive order. Damien, too, had

an ecumenical outreach, and visited the sick or elderly in the hospital and at *Star of the Sea* home.

Brother Barry Lamb in 2011 was a member of the Brothers' community in Cairns. He began sharing his time between Thursday Island and Cairns. On T.I. he started assisting some of the senior pupils who may have benefited by a little extra help with their English and Maths in preparation for their heading to the mainland for secondary school. However very quickly Barry became involved with researching and writing the history of the school for the 125 years Jubilee in 2012. He spent some of his time on T.I. researching the history and then time in Cairns, Brisbane and Sydney continuing the research and writing, returning to T.I. in March, 2012, to complete the research.

As the years went by it became clear that Thursday Island would not be lacking a priest as initially feared. And so the original idea of the Brothers coming ceased to apply.

At the time of Jubilee, 2012, the continuation of Marist Brothers on T.I. was uncertain.



## CHAPTER 35

### Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School in the early twenty-first century

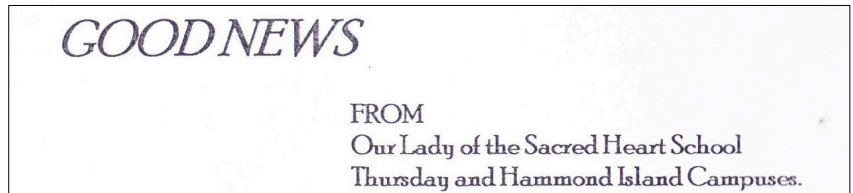
#### 2001-2002

For a short time in 2001 Mr. George de Jong was Principal. Coming over from Hammond Island each day, he is remembered with appreciation for his fidelity to meeting with the Indigenous School Officer on a regular basis, each Thursday at 11.30am, and keeping abreast of the requirements of the indigenous community. He was succeeded by Mr. Tony Tulacz (pictured) for a brief period in the role of Acting Principal. By 2003 Mrs. Patricia Priestly, who had been at the Catholic Education Office in Cairns, was appointed Principal. She was described by a colleague of the time as “a fantastic Principal”, and was said to be always there for the School Officer in keeping in close touch with indigenous needs.



#### Snapshot of the year 2003

Thanks again to those who put aside and kept the School Newsletters for 2003. From them we learn about aspects of school life during that year. Sounding a positive note, Mrs. Priestly's early Newsletters for 2003 were headed, “Good News”.



She invites parents to be actively involved in the Parents and Friends and also the ASSPA. There is an announcement, too, of a “School Board of Education” meeting for 15<sup>th</sup> February. (Photo: Patricia Priestly)



A heading “School Image”, in the Newsletter of early February, stresses the wearing of the school uniform:

*“I do not want people making false claims for the school, but I do want the image of the school to be a positive one. The fact that there has been an improvement in the number of students wearing their uniforms to school makes our students look good, as though they actually belong somewhere and are proud of the fact. Thank you for making that possible.”*

Early in the year we read a somewhat plaintive letter/announcement advertising a Young Adult/Childrens’ Mass and Disco set down for Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> March. Organised by Brother Thomas Rice it states:

*“We are trying very hard to have our children come back to Jesus their special friend. Throughout the year our intention is to have a special Children’s Liturgy, where they take a very active part in all aspects of the Eucharistic celebration. It also gives each person greater confidence when we come together as a Community of believers to share our common faith. It may be a long time since we have been to Church ... God understands that. ...”*

This Youth Mass was to be followed by a time for socialising and a Disco in the Hall.

In the early months of the year there were the election campaign for School Boy and Girl Captains and vice-Captains and for student councilors from Years 4 and 5; a faith Education Program was held at the start of Lent; the Sacramental Program was begun; excursions began to “chosen sites around the island” for years 6 and 7; an Easter Egg raffle was held.

Principal, Mrs Patricia Priestly, reported on educational changes at a Rotary Breakfast during February:

*“I was invited to speak about education at a rotary breakfast meeting last week. The members were interested in the talk which was basically a rundown on why education has to change. Why we can’t keep on doing the things the way we used to do them. The changes we have made at this school made sense to them, so they are aware of what we are doing and why we have made changes.”*

This appears to be related to recently formed "Literacy and Numeracy Groups". We read:

*"Students are keen to work in their literacy and numeracy groups. I think that there is pressure to perform placed on the students, but the achievements are possible, whereas students previously were struggling to all perform at the one average level. This hindered the progress of the students who can learn quickly and at the same time it punished the students who were not ready to work at that level."*

It is common for the Catholic Church to participate in "Project Compassion" during Lent. Three fund-raising activities for this appeal in March and April were a "Coin Trail" where loose change spelt out the words "Project Compassion", a Lunch-time Disco and a Cake and Book Stall. It is remarked in another Newsletter that, *"Too often, children get into the habit of asking for and accepting gifts, but miss out on the joy of giving to those less fortunate than themselves."*


Some senior students were participating in sports training *"offered by the state school sport coaches."* Besides providing coaching it enabled students to, *"meet up with students from other schools and have the opportunity later to participate in trials for State level teams."*

Shoes or sandals were stressed in another Newsletter, emphasising that footwear was a must!

Aroundabout this time Bishop Ted Mosby and wife Marie had children at the school and it was a custom at the start of the year for not only Father Hilary Flynn to dedicate the school year to God and bless the children and staff, but Bishop Mosby joined Father Flynn in this prayerful ceremony in an ecumenical service. The Stations of the Cross in Holy Week, too, were of an ecumenical character. A Catholic/Anglican procession would visit various crosses in the Catholic school yard, culminating in the Crucifixion and final Stations at the Catholic Church.

For almost 12 years Iris Abednego (pictured) was a School Officer and the School Liaison Officer and was an invaluable link with the indigenous community for all that time. Iris had all the contacts and was active in bringing in people to help with cultural awareness and Island dancing. Many students and parents would remember Iris with great appreciation and affection.





Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School  
Newsletter  
Thursday Island & Hammond Island  
All for Jesus. 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2003.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School is committed to providing an education for students that is based on catholic values which support Christian living and family life.

Because the number of students is low, your child is presented with excellent learning opportunities. No literacy or numeracy class is larger than fourteen. Learning support is provided for those students who need extra help. An education in the Catholic faith is also provided plus an extraordinary level of pastoral care.

As parents, your role in this partnership is to encourage your child or children. Ensure that they are sent to school every day, not just when they feel like it. Send them with pencils, ruler, rubber and books. Teachers should not have to provide these essentials, yet that is the reality. From now on, teachers will send home a short proforma note, letting you know when your child does not have these essentials.

The alternative to parents providing these necessities is that parents are more visible and support the fundraising efforts and working bees at the school. That way there will be an income provided to cover these necessities.

Your child will have homework set for four nights per week, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evening. Work will be corrected on the Friday. Each teacher will send home literacy and numeracy work. Getting the work done at home will be a parental responsibility. If reading books are sent home, then it is your responsibility to ensure the safe return of the books.

Please help develop the partnership between home and school by supporting all the initiatives of teachers and parent committees.  
Pat.

Volunteers are called for in a Newsletter of 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2003. Parents are encouraged to tick three groups of the following to indicate their willingness: General Maintenance, Gardening, Lawns, Major Cleaning (Walls, paths etc.), Painting, Working in the Library. Parents in general made a weak response to this call and this drew a bit of a dressing down in the following Newsletter:

*"There are a couple of concerns I would like to focus on in this Newsletter. The first is the almost lack of response to the appeal to you to nominate an area where you can give of your personal talents and willingness to support education for your child. The response was limited. The number of families in our school is well over fifty on both campuses. There are some areas of caring for the school buildings and grounds that cannot be covered by one groundsman. If you think that fees collected from parents at this school can provide all the running costs and some extras at this school, then I am sorry to say that that is very far from the truth. If you think that the fete later in the year supports the school, then again you are wrong. The fete is to support the parish. Please look again at the last page of this newsletter and think about how you can best help."*



Finally, on 13<sup>th</sup> May there was a note of appreciation to those who *had* volunteered.

The refurbished Hall was officially opened by local federal Member, Mr. Warren Entsch, on 9<sup>th</sup> May, two years after completion.

As had happened for many years, special ceremonies in honour of Our Lady took place at the end of May:

*"This morning [27<sup>th</sup> May] Father Hilary celebrated a special Mass to honour Mary our Mother in Heaven. The children sang well, made the responses at the appropriate places and behaved in a much better fashion than at our previous mass.*

*As a sign of devotion to Mary, each of the children carried a tiny flower or posy into the church and at the offertory, placed the flowers at the altar."*

(Photos show crowns held in the T.I. sacristy, 2012. The close-up shows the centre-piece of a crown created by Nola Ward with the age-old product of the Torres Strait, pearls and pearl-shell)



The Student Representative Council had been busy. Catherine Saylor and the SRC placed this notice in the Newsletter of 27<sup>th</sup> May:

*"The SRC held a disco last Thursday for fundraising. We had games and popcorn for sale for 20c. We raised over \$28 to help Pricilla [Majid] with her basketball trip. She leaves this Sunday to go to Cairns and we wish her all the very best."*

Mabo Day was remarkable in 2003 for the fact that OLSH Captain, Katijah Keenan, gave an address in the Park in commemoration of Eddie Mabo. Her speech was delivered with great composure and was very well received. A tiny extract is as follows:

*"By his beliefs, strength and actions, Eddie Mabo and his supporters opened up the way for other islander people and aborigines to claim their lands for the traditional owners. I, as a Torres Strait Islander, feel very inspired by another Torres Strait Islander, namely Eddie Mabo, who fought to gain recognition for indigenous people in Australia and then around the world."*

The enormous importance of family influence in handing on the spiritual inheritance of the Catholic faith was stressed in a Newsletter of 17<sup>th</sup> June. And parents were reminded that the *"Catholic School cannot be expected to be the major educational faith agency."*

"Curriculum Re-arrangements", as a heading, announced:

*"This semester [July, 2003] the curriculum offerings at the school have been increased. Students are now time-tabled into groups studying poetry, drama, media, technology and information technology. Health and Physical Education is also a formal part of the timetable. Literacy, numeracy and integrated studies continue to be the main thrust in the school."*

During July boys presented a Murray Island Silent Dance at the Croc Fest assisted by girls giving musical support. Those helping prepare were Elsie and May Passi with Jenny Chivilo, who, *"never gave up on the boys, encouraging, threatening, cheering ..."*

Trip to Dimbulah. *"A group of our Yrs 5, 6 and 7 students are travelling to Dimbulah next week [early Sept., 2003] on an educational excursion to see how a small farming community live their lives. It will be a great experience for the students. There will also be opportunities to observe life in a boarding school through visits to Saint Augustine's and Mount Saint Bernard's Colleges."*



October, 2003: Farewell to Fr. Hilary Flynn and welcome to Father Tom Mullins. Announcement of new Principal, Maree Read, for 2004.

Concern about the poor attendance of some pupils was voiced in October, 2003 and picked out in bold type. It was stressed that, **"It is a legal requirement that a child attends school."**

End-of-Year concert preparations underway in November with an invitation to perform “for the oldies” at Star of the Sea.

Finishing Principal, Patricia Priestly, ended her final Newsletter for 2003, with, among other things, the following:

*“I am leaving the school with memories of noise, laughter, keen students, lazy students, ill mannered students, artistic students, athletic students, students who were keen to help with any tasks and didn’t grumble, students who were absent too often with no excuse, parents who were concerned about their children and those who appeared not to care.*

*“We all know that this school has had its ups and downs. 2004 is going to be a year of celebration [125 years since the foundation of the Sacred Heart Mission in 1884]. Our enrolments have increased at both campuses. Hammond Is. has eight pre-schoolers enrolled, Thursday Is. has fourteen. I know one needs to be wary of enrolment numbers. XXXX on seats are what counts, but we also have a further eight students coming into the Thursday Is. Campus at different grade levels.*

*“Thank you for riding out the rough times with the school. Welcome Maree [Read] in your typical island fashion. Come up to the school and introduce yourselves. Don’t let her think your children are orphans. May the new life of Christ we celebrate at Christmas inspire each of us to a joyous and lively 2004.”*

During Maree Read’s time there was enormous energy put into gaining beneficial grants for the school. Along with the help of Jenny Chivilo, Maree Read worked tirelessly to get winning applications ready, to the great benefit of the school. The buildings of the time would not have become a reality, it was said, without Maree’s work. Costumed plays and pageants were the order of the day, also, and Margaret SeeKee remembers preparing costumes and soldiers’ helmets etc. for the Holy Week Passion plays.

## Insights into 2007

Lisette Spaul was Principal in 2007 and the School Newsletters of that year give an insight into aspects of school life. Lisette put a special emphasis on the wearing of the correct uniform, including shoes. It was said that in her time, “*dressing standards*

*were A1.” Behind this emphasis was the nurturing of respect and pride in self and, “in creating school spirit and bonding the students as a group.” As had been previously*

*stressed it was emphasised that footwear must always be worn. Hats, too, were compulsory for playing outside. And late-coming to school was mentioned with encouragement to punctuality.*

A colleague recalled that Lisette Spaul had a soft heart for the kids and if anyone was upset, she was there.

In week one of 2007 it was declared that “This year we aim to follow “Assertive Discipline Plan” which emphasises the right of the teacher to teach and students to learn in an atmosphere of mutual respect.” Parts of the aims of this approach stressed cooperation; sense of belonging as a group; taking responsibility; consideration and politeness.



<p>Killer Ghost Nets (Hammond Island Campus)</p> <p>We went to see the ghost nets down at the beach. We meet Uncle Fundan Judith and Auntie Ellis. They are the rangers on Hammond Island. A ghost net is a fishing net that someone has dumped in the sea because they didn't want it anymore. We measured the length and the size of the holes then we looked at a book to see where the nets came from. Ghost nets kill sea animals like turtles, dugongs, sharks and even coral.</p> <p>By Nathan Bob, Year 3</p>	<p>Grade 4</p> <p>Term 2 has started off with the Year 4's learning all about the weather. We have a rain gauge and thermometer to record the weather each day. We have also done some great science experiments to learn about condensation and the water cycle. We start to prepare for First Holy Communion which will be on the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> of June (week 8). Please ensure permission slips are returned.</p> <p>Thank you. Year 4, Miss Farrugia &amp; Mrs Vellis</p>
<p>Grade 7</p> <p>Welcome back to all students and families for a busy term 2. Our Year 7 integrated unit this term is: "Have you ever wondered?" which will be science based with an emphasis on procedure writing. We will also be doing a mini language unit on poetry. We aim to compile a class anthology by the end of the term. Stay tuned for some great student poems in this section of the newsletter.</p> <p>Year 7, Mrs Mitchell &amp; Mrs Vellis</p>	<p>Grade 5/6</p> <p>Congratulations to Year 5/6 on winning the school Water Wise poster competition. The presentation was on Friday night at Gab Titui Cultural Centre and the children represented the school beautifully. Thank you to all Year 5/6 students. We are continuing our Australian theme for a few more weeks. Year 5/6 will be visiting the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> May. Thank you to all the children who were able to march on ANZAC Day. A great job well done.</p> <p>Regards Cathy Ryan and Margaret See Kee</p>
<p>Football/Basketball Cake Stall</p> <p>Thank you to all families and friends who participated with our cake stall by donating, buying and manning the stall. We appreciate your support and successfully raised \$746.50, bringing our total to \$1014.50. Thank you. \$300 will go to the expenses incurred for trip to Badu by the six boys and congratulations to Locky Parmenter who made it into the U12 Torres Strait team. The children worked hard on Saturday.</p> <p>From the Basketball/Football children, Miss Ah Boo &amp; Mr Emerick</p>	



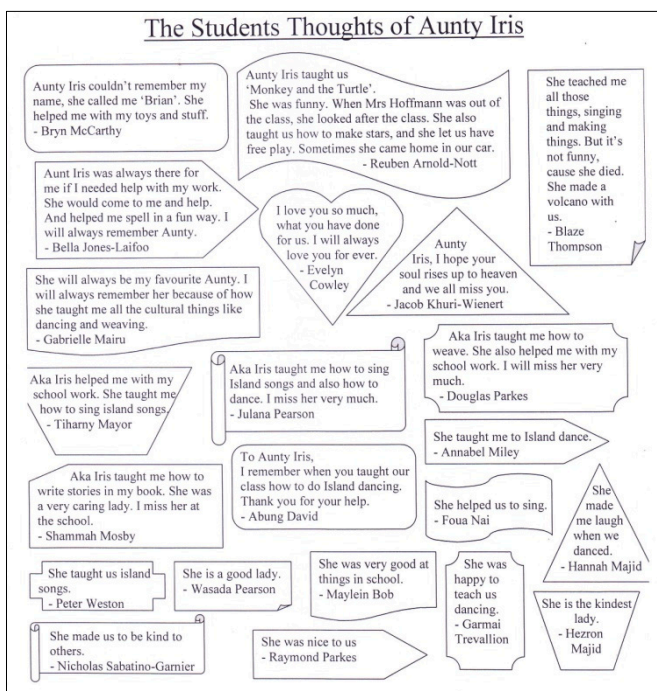
School captain for the year was Nikita Wackerow with Sports Captains: T'kido Titasey, McDermott; Jacob Miley, Barrett; Harold Pearson, Doyle.

Often the Newsletter would give short class reports, similar to those noticed in 2003. Principal Lisette Spaul was in the habit of giving some uplifting thoughts, often of a spiritual nature, in each Newsletter, often finding an appropriate quotation from a book or other source. And example is as follows from 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2007:

*"Dear God, Help me to be a good sport in the game of life. I don't ask for a cosy place in the line-up. Put me anywhere you need me. I only ask that I can give you 100% of everything I have. If all the hard tasks seem to come my way, I thank you for the compliment. Help me to remember that You never send a player more trouble than he can handle with Your help. Help me to accept the bad breaks as part of the game."*

And on 16<sup>th</sup> March:

*"We do harm to our children when we hurry them through childhood as Dr John Duby reminds us when he says, 'Children should be allowed to be children. Childhood is a preparation, not a full performance.' Children need space in which to grow, to learn and to develop. The value of true play, which fosters fantasy and imagination, has been diminished in our society and needs to be reemphasised. Children need time for personal expression."*



Like schools throughout the world, Sacred Heart School is helped to survive with Working Bees, and 2007 was no exception. In March there were trees and shrubs to trim, fences fixed, hornets' nests removed, rocks to clear and windows cleaned.

In May there was a fund-raiser by way of an Art Show of children's art work. Works were to be sold for \$5 a child or \$10 per family.

In true Catholic fashion the school community was constantly reminded in the early months of 2007 to pray for the recovery from illness of Aunty Iris Abednego, a valued teacher at Sacred Heart with special emphasis on Islander culture. Iris died in May and the children were asked if they would like to record a short memory of their former teacher and friend. Some of these are reproduced here. With great fidelity over many years, Rita Dorante

on Hammond Island continued the tradition of the Crowning of Our Lady towards the end of May each year. She inserted the attached reminder in the Newsletter of 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2007 (see box).

The Newsletters for 2007 included regular snippets from the Hammond Island Campus telling of student achievements, visitors speaking to the children and excursions to T.I.

During September there were congratulation to Sacred Heart Eagles football team for making it into the Grand Finals. Though they didn't win, at least they made it to the Grand Finals!

A link with the rest of the world and with the World Youth Day in Sydney was the passing through of the Cross and Icon on 23<sup>rd</sup> September on their way to Sydney.

A November Newsletter told of the delight of the children who had gone on an excursion to the Gold Coast, "returning tired but very happy." Rita and John Dorante were specially thanked of their help and various

Reminder Notice: To Hammond Island Parents and Carers -

The Crowning of the Statue of Mary, will be on Saturday 26th May starting at 2.30pm, followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and a BBQ later. Children are asked to be at the church no later than 2.15pm. Families are most welcome to come along and celebrate together with the children the crowning of the statue of Mary, the Mother of God.

Thanks.  
Rita Dorante

children told of their favourite highlights in the Class Notes section of the Newsletter. November also was the time for Swimming Lessons and the Swimming Carnival.

All that remained was Carols by Candle light, Year 7 Graduation Mass and the Christmas Concert.



### 2008 and Principal, Helen Kett

Adding a splash of colour to her assumption of the Principalship of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Helen Kett headed up the first Newsletter of the year 2008 with a coloured bannerhead. However with the second Newsletter a pattern began that was continued for many issues:

Each Newsletter opened with a prayer, followed by words "From the Principal's Desk".

And in this second Newsletter, Miss Kett set out a "few

simple but effective rules we will use:

Hands & feet to yourself  
Speak to please not to tease  
Instant cheerful obedience  
Right place right time  
Look after our environment

**Remember – no hat – no play."**

Helen Kett's background is an interesting one. After graduating in teaching Helen spent some time at an inner-city Melbourne school., Then followed two years as Mistress in Charge at a small school on Nauru; two years in Tonga; then as principal in a country Victorian school, then as education officer at the Sovereign Hill Historical Village in Ballarat where staff dress up in the costume of the Gold Rush days. There followed periods as Principal in Katherine, then Darwin, gaining great experience in indigenous communities. Before coming to T.I. Helen was Principal at St. Augustine's Primary School at Mossman.

Helen's colleagues found her to be calm, gentle, generous, compassionate, approachable and resilient. She was said to take on twice as many duties as everyone else so that teachers could take a little time to unwind. "Very giving" is how one described her. It was common to find that she was unavailable to the phone or a visitor to the school since she was teaching ... relieving in a class. She went about things quietly and without fuss, with lots of patience and absence of fluster. The children came first in everything, and Helen was keen to be abreast of each child's background and circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Year 7 students aspiring to be School or House captains were urged to prepare a speech for the elections. At the end of the process Annabelle Miley was elected Captain and Anthony Nicholls, Vice Captain for 2008.

**Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School**

## Newsletter Term 1, Week 2

Tuesday 5th February 2008

**Prayer**

"Lord, we ask You to strengthen us in our role as members of families and our school.

Help us to be positive, encouraging and appreciative of all the persons in our family.

Guide us to see things as they truly are. May our attitude and outlook be inspired by You to be faith-filled, hope-filled and courageous.

**Amen**

**From the principal's desk**

**Welcome to week 2.**

I have enjoyed meeting some of you as you come into school in the morning or afternoon. Please feel comfortable in arranging a time for a longer chat if you have any concerns or queries. Weeks One and Two are important weeks for our teachers to get to know their students, set class expectations and rules, begin their testing to see where every student is along the continuum in English and Maths and meet you.

Thank you to those parents who did make it to the meeting with Dr Bill Sultmann last week. I look forward to meeting with more of you when we have our first P & F meeting for the year.

**Learning support & Whole School Testing:**

Our LST [learning support teacher], Ms Ludke will be going into each class to provide us with whole school testing [not prep of course]. This data is what we call base line data and we will compare June and November testing against this to see how far students will have come over the school year. As our LST, Ms Ludke will be developing programs for students who qualify for learning support. This support will be given either by Ms Ludke or learning support school officers. Parents will be contacted prior to any learning support programs being started and at the end of Semesters One and Two a learning support report will be attached to the Semester school report.

Any concerns about your child's learning progress should be directed firstly to the classroom teacher who will speak with both Ms Ludke and myself to see if further testing is needed or if there is a need for extra support.

Important Dates	
Ash Wednesday Liturgy at 12pm	6th Feb
Meet & Greet Info session at 5.30pm, T.I	12th Feb
"Serve Hot" Forum at PK Hall 6-9pm	13th Feb
P&F Meeting at 5.15pm	13th Feb
Welcome back liturgy at 9am	14th Feb
Meet & Greet Info session at 5.00pm on Hammond Island	14th Feb
P&F AGM Meeting at 7pm	27th Feb

<sup>1</sup> Colleagues' conversations with Brother Barry in 2011. Much unanimity was found in their comments.



A new development, common in many schools throughout the modern world, was the invitation to parents that they may prefer to receive the Newsletter by email rather than a hard copy.

To get a sense of the tone of the “Prayer” in future Newsletters, consider this one from 12th February, 2008:

*“Recipe for a Lenten Garden: First, plant 5 rows of peas... Preparedness, promptness, perseverance, politeness, prayer. Next, Plant 3 rows of squash ... Squash gossip, squash criticism, squash indifference. Then, Plant 4 rows of lettuce ... Let us be loyal, let us be unselfish, let us be truthful, let us be faithful. No garden is complete without turnips ... Turn up for Mass, turn up with a smile, turn up with a new idea, turn up with determination.”*

Attention was drawn to the significance of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s Apology to the “Stolen Generation” to take place the day following the Newsletter.

The program “*You Can Do It*” was being introduced, and as part of the program there were plans to give YCDI awards for Getting Along, Confidence, Organisation, Persistence and Emotional Resilience. Another feature of the program was the “Catastrophe Scale” which enabled students to keep mishaps and small irritations in perspective. Further information on this program was provided as time went by. The sentences and words You Can Do It, Organisation, Resilience, Persistence, Confidence and Getting Along were neatly stencilled into a prominent school concrete pathway.



The biggest fund-raiser for the school is the Wongai Ball. Monies raised from the Ball go towards “extras” for the school. The 2007 Ball was a financial success and the Parents & Friends decided to allocate the profits in the following way:

- \$8000 Improvements to school library
- \$600 Guitars and covers
- \$700 Christmas 2007 resources (\$100 went to each class including Hammond)
- \$800 Ferry travel to Hammond Island parents to attend P&F Meetings
- \$843.45 2007 Year 7 Senior Shirts
- \$ 315 Year 7 Graduates lunch at Jardine.

**Our Holy Week Prayer Journey:**

Thank you to all of our classes for praying with us over the last week. This week our Year 6/7 class will remind us of the message of the Resurrection.



“*No Shoes – no Play*” was added to the slogan, “*No Hat – no Play*”. The astute reader will have noticed that children arriving at school without shoes or sandals was, in 2008, not a recent development.



Natural disasters are happening all the time, both in Australia and throughout the world. Sometimes they prompt a response by way of a collection and sending of financial assistance. In March, 2008, the Catholic Schools in Mackay had been damaged through floods and it was decided to make St. Patrick’s Day festivities an occasion for raising funds. There were to be free (green) dress for a gold coin donation, a funny hat parade, and some little raffles. And showing what a good sport she was, Miss Kett – for 50c. a ticket – offered herself as a “Slave for a couple of hours” to the winner: “*She will do your work, carry your belongings, or anything else you might think of within reason!*” All the fundraising efforts combined raised \$120.50.

So important were Grants in school planning and development ever since the 1980s or so, that there was a "Grants Committee" to decide on which grants to apply for, and then to prepare the submissions.

Pageants illustrating Jesus' passion during Holy Week, 2008, are illustrated in the accompanying photos.

Two items in the Newsletter of 15<sup>th</sup> April heralded changes in the school and parish. One told of Father Tom Mullins being obliged to be away *"for at least 5 weeks if not longer"* through illness, and other was the visit by a delegation of Marist Brothers, *"who are looking at the possibilities of developing a Youth outreach program on Thursday Island."* It was noted in August that there had been "Building progress" at "the Monastery". This was a substantial re-figuring of the old convent building to include three en-suites for better occupation of Brothers or other religious if they were to come to T.I. As it subsequently turned out, four Marist Brothers were to come in 2009 to begin different ministries on T.I., including in the school.

Customs Boat visit by Prep/One (April 18<sup>th</sup>): *"We walked from school. We saw the bridge. We sat in the captain and Engineer and Watch Keeper's chairs. They showed us where the guns are and the kitchen. We went to the bow. It was a fabulous visit."*

### Marist Brothers in 2009

The Marist brothers have taken up an offer from our Bishop to come up here to Thursday Island. There will be four brothers living in the old convent/monastery, newly refurbished by Catholic Education. Three of them will be mostly involved in youth ministry in some way while one will be our RE co ordinator in our school. This will provide assistance in RE teaching and planning for our

teachers, as well as assisting in liturgy preparation and liaison with Father Tom.

We will have an official welcome for the brothers when we return in the new year. The brothers will be a great asset and support within the parish community.

In September there were "Curriculum Coffee Morning Chats". These were to look at curriculum areas that were planned to be a special focus in 2009. The first Coffee morning was to be "having fun learning Science."

October saw four children from Year Six off to Badu Island for a leadership camp to learn strategies and skills of leadership in preparation for 2009. PCAP funding made this possible. These children were Gracie, Dauba, Raymond and Mahonri. In a report they later wrote they spoke of learning the five keys to success, the 'self

wheel' and the 4's for listening, amongst other things.

At about the same time Year 5 students headed off to Cairns for their Cultural Camp. But the proposed Year 6/7 excursion to Canberra was cancelled due to cost. Such excursions further than Cairns were to be considered from now on to be a once every two or three years affair. The Year 5 Cultural Exchange Program was declared to be a "fantastic success". It was remarked that, *"This has been an exciting event for some students who have never travelled away from their home comfort zone."* Besides visiting three different schools the class visited Tjapukai Aboriginal Centre, travelled on the Sky Rail and the Kuranda railway as well as calling in to the Cairns Tropical Zoo and enjoying a session of Ten Pin Bowling. Progressively the children completed daily diaries and on returning to school put together a class booklet along with photos.

### Welcome back to the Sisters of Mercy

This week we have been fortunate to have five Sisters of Mercy with us as our Diocese celebrates 120 years of Mercy service to the community. Sister Rovena was telling me that they have visited every school and parish where Sisters of Mercy have been stationed. No mean feat when you consider how many communities have been involved.

While here the Sisters have presented to the parish and to the school a very beautiful Mercy Cross made from Tolga wood. Yesterday morning Sister Rovena told the students a short version of the history of the

Mercy Sisters in our region and a little about Catherine McAuley the foundress of the Mercy Congregation in Dublin in 1831.

Sister Faye, Sister Patricia, Sister Margaret, Sister Marie and Sister Rovena then visited all of the classes to meet with the children and present to them some pens and pencils, as well as answering any questions.

It has been wonderful to chat and listen to many of the stories they have had to share about their years here on Thursday Island. I know they have enjoyed meeting with old acquaint-

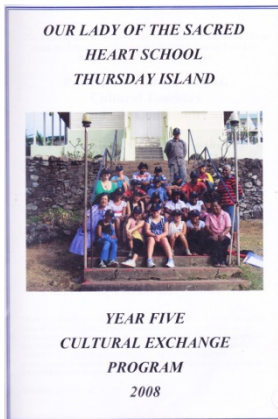
ances and old students.

There has been much laughter and the school and parish community has welcomed the return of a much loved group of people.

The Sisters will be with us until the 9th November so there is plenty of time to catch up with them







(Photos from the booklet summarizing the Cultural Exchange Program.)



An important decision for the Hammond Island community was the unanimous support for starting a Pre-Prep on Hammond in 2009. Those on T.I. asking if a Pre-Prep was planned were told that, “If families see this as a need, we need to have names of potential pre-preps so I can inform the CES and they can make a decision one way or the other.

In November, 2008, the Sisters of Mercy celebrated 120 years of service in this area of the world, beginning in Cooktown. Five Sisters returned to OLSH School where the Sisters had ministered from 1968 till almost the end of the century.

And in the middle of Term 4, 2008, there was the attached announcement that Marist Brothers would be taking up residence in the old Convent-cum-Monastery in 2009.

### Draft Curriculum Plan, 2009-2013

Changing directions or changing emphases in a school can be seen in Curriculum Plans that try to foresee the needs of the coming years. An insight into the educational philosophy of the school at this time – 2008 onwards – can be gained by looking at the Draft Five Year Curriculum Plan being discussed in Term 4, 2008. Under the heading “**Curriculum [student learning]**” we read:

- Whole school numeracy plan
- Introduction of Science, Primary Investigations program
- Improvement in reading comprehension skills especially in middle and upper primary
- Improved use of Technology KLA
- Development of Whole School Literacy plan
- Improve emotional Resilience and Well Being program [YCDI]
- Building of diverse reading resources
- Development of Performing
- Development of Whole School Physical Education program
- Improved ESL strategies and programs
- Development of whole school cultural program
- Re-introduction of LOTE for Yr 6/7
- Development of our library as a resource centre and the ‘hub’ of our school
- Opportunities for students to learn musical instruments at a low cost & low rental for instruments
- Development of a leadership program for our Yrs 6/7 students.

### The year 2009

A burst of enthusiasm for music helped launch 2009. A “Music Program” was announced. It was to include a School Choir, Keyboard Learning and funding for new instruments, including guitar, flute, and perhaps violin.



In February, 2009, there was the most catastrophic bushfire in parts of Victoria and a significant number of people lost their lives in the fires. All around Australia there were appeals for assistance and OLSH School raised \$270 to send to the appeal. Then during Lent the bushfire victims were still in their thoughts and prayers with a Lenten collection of teddy bears, “to go to children who lost all their toys.”

In October a tsunami had devastated parts of Samoa and Tonga. Brother Damien, one of the Marist Brothers, spoke to Year 7s of his experience in those countries. As a result Year 7 planned a special fundraising event for the relief of those affected.

Twenty-first century realities of communication technology had not escaped the school. Regulations regarding the bringing of iPods and iPhones to school were spelt out in a Newsletter during Term One. Similarly there was a rather formidable “Computer Access Agreement 2009” form to be filled in for the use of computers in the school. There were several “I will” statements followed by far more “I will not” statements, to be signed by each student.

The standardised bannerhead that became familiar on the front page of the 2008 Newsletter had been abandoned in 2009 and each new week saw a different style of letterhead.

The Program adopted in 2008, *“Your Can Do It”* continued in 2009 and in September the theme, *Getting Along* was given emphasis, with time spent on the theme of Kindness.

Well into the first decade of the twenty-first century Australian schools had become quite accustomed to, if not addicted, to Grants! In the Newsletter of 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2009, there was mention in the Parents and Friends section of a Block Grant, *“to build a solid shade structure and perhaps an extra room,”* and a list of projects that were to benefit from *“our \$75000 School Pride money.”*



But a strange circumstance came to benefit every Primary school in Australia in 2009-2010. The financial world was rocked by “The Global Financial Crisis”. Suffice it to say that there was real fear in developed countries that the world might be plunged into a depression similar to that of 1929. The Australian Government of the time decided on a “Stimulus Package” to keep the economy healthy and keep people in work. One scheme was to give every Australian \$900 to spend! The other major stimulus was to build a hall

for every Australian school. This became known as the “Building the Education Revolution” program, or “BER.” At Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, T.I., the decision was to build the large open-air shelter assembly/recreation area. For several years a sign explaining the funding of this structure was displayed to the public.

But beside Grant projects, there was the money raised by the P&F, particularly through the Wongai Ball. And that money was to be spent democratically, as evidenced by the invitation in the Newsletter of 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2009: *“Don’t forget to send in your ideas about how we can spend our Wongai Ball profits. Think about the resources you want to see in our school. Staff are already discussing their ideas.”*



Nine submissions were listed in a subsequent Newsletter, and finally, on 12<sup>th</sup> November the decisions were made to purchase 2 marquees for use on Sports Days, library books, new readers and quotes to be sought on aluminium bench seating.

A tradition grew up that Year 6 would go on three excursions in Third Term: to Horn Island for World War Two history, to Friday Island for an introduction to the cultured pearl industry and to Green Hill Fort Museum for the history of the defences of Thursday Island and some insights into the pearling industry of old.

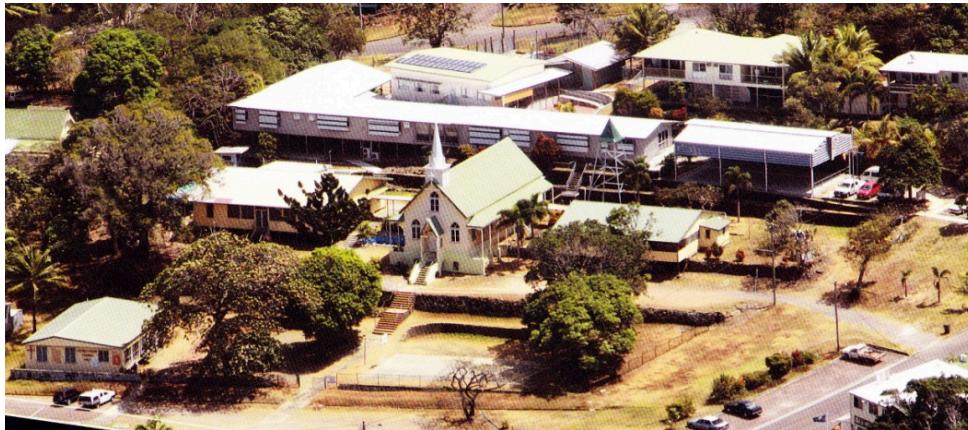
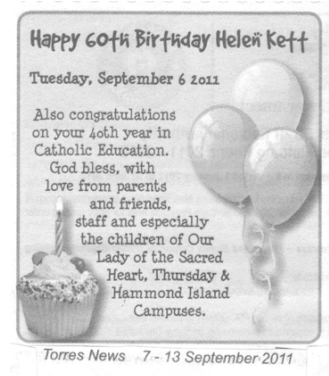


(Picture shows Liberty Seekee explaining details of the military installations on Horn Island during World War II.)



It became customary to celebrate Mabo Day on Thursday Island with a procession and concert. On Mabo Day, 2011 (or actually the day before), the Mayor of the Torres Strait, Mr. Pedro Stephen, visited the school and spoke to the children. Besides telling the children about Eddie Mabo he also thanked and congratulated the school for always being present in civic activities on the Island. He mentioned that whenever anything was on there you could see the blue uniforms of the children from the Sacred Heart School.

And the reader who has skimmed the story of the previous more than 120 years will notice that it was always thus.



(Photo copyright MSP Photography North Queensland. It shows the school precinct towards the end of 2011 before the old “Orphanage” was removed. This building is that in the centre top of the photo and is surrounded on two sides by the L of the school building.)

## New Library, 2012

As may be seen from the aerial photo above, the 2011 library, which was the ground floor of the old 1889 “Orphanage”, filled a space that would have been better used as an open space for the children’s “playground”. Besides that a very ancient building had been pressed into service as a library for many years at a time when internet access etc. meant that libraries had become information and communication resource centres, not just book repositories. And so the decision was made to remove the old building and to build a new “library” closer to Chester Street. Preparations were made for this at the end of school, 2011, and the building was completed very early in 2012.

(Both photos are taken looking West. One shows the turfing with an artificial fabric that will take the constant stamp of feet and drain quickly after rain. Both photos were taken at the time of construction. Rolls of the artificial turf can be seen at the right of the “lawn”.)



## Project Compassion, 2012

Continuing a long tradition within the school of encouraging assistance to the less fortunate, the School “Project Compassion 2012” announced the hope:

*“... to inspire our children to BE more rather than to HAVE more.” ... “Students from Prep to Year 7 will be asked to donate to their Project Compassion box over the next six weeks. Students might like to donate their lolly money or donate some of their pocket money. Other children might offer to do some odd jobs around the house in exchange for a donation to the Project Compassion box. Any donation big or small makes a HUGE difference to the lives of those fighting for justice, peace and survival every day.”*



### A quarter of a century of service



Long-serving school officer Christine Benjamin receives her certificate of appreciation from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School principal Helen Kett.

At the end of March, 2012, there was a special Assembly and party to congratulate and thank Christine Benjamin for “25 years of Service and Love” -- as the School Newsletter expressed it -- to Catholic Education both on the T.I. and Hammond Island Campuses of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School.

(The photo is from the *Torres News* of 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2012, both photo and article by Mark Roy.)

In the Principal’s Report for the P&F AGM of 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2012, there was mention of some increase in student numbers; delays in building; curriculum developments and the move in Australia towards a National Curriculum and its impact on the school;

some staffing changes; the disappointment that some legal problems regarding the safety of the youngest children had prevented the T.I. campus from continuing with a Pre-Prep class it had begun at the start of the year; planning for the 125<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebrations; and finishing with praise and thanks to the 2011 P&F Executive for all their generous and painstaking work.



(This telescopic photo shows the school as seen from Green Hill at Easter, 2012, and shows the newly built library in the foreground.

Photo by Br. Tim Beencke)



## CHAPTER 36

### Thursday Island and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School in 2012



As the year 2012 began, the stories of both Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School and Thursday Island itself are tales of vitality and modernity. Both school and town are very much part of mainstream Australia ... but with a certain Thursday Island flavour.

Most homes have many, if not all, “mod cons”: mains power, fresh tap water, television, washing machines and dish washers. Many have computers and internet access. Many citizens have mobile phones and the younger generation is seen listening to iPods and texting friends and social networking. Those who don’t have cars make use of a number of taxis that are in constant demand.

Most things available to people in small towns in Australia (and the developed world) are available on Thursday Island: supermarkets, grocery stores, pharmacy, newsagent, video store, clothing store, hardware, cafes, hotels, bottle shops, restaurants etc. The service of the Post Office is similar to others throughout Australia. There is a medical clinic and a well-equipped and well staffed hospital. Various sports teams compete. A large number of families have powered fishing vessels and enjoy recreational fishing in the Strait. A weekly newspaper, the *Torres News*, services the Torres Strait, and Thursday Island stories feature prominently, and there is the opportunity of writing “Letters to the Editor”.

There is a strong sense of T.I. community spirit, and various celebrations on the island are frequented by many, with family groups being a feature. Often these occasions are held in Anzac Park and mats and chairs are brought along and occasionally various Service Clubs and others offer food or crafts for sale. Floral dresses and shirts are commonly a bright feature of T.I. celebrations, and there can be the glow of fluorescent wands or necklaces or wrist bands after sunset.

Sacred Heart School has most of the facilities of similarly sized schools throughout Australia. Computers are used by various classes during the day and the teaching and presentation tool of the time, the “PowerPoint” presentation, is available and used throughout the school. Children are familiar with storing data on “USB”s or “flash drives”, and they are able to create attractive presentations of their work using various computer compositing and printing programs.

Many children speak English quite fluently and speak up confidently, slipping into and out of Creole as circumstances call for. The pleasant social integration of fellow-students of different backgrounds, remarked on favourably throughout the entire history of the school, continues into the 125<sup>th</sup> year.

Occasionally at the school there are activities related to Torres Strait culture through dance or palm frond weaving etc. The *warup* – the Torres Strait drum -- is occasionally used to accompany hymns or songs during the liturgy. If there are any to suggest that Sacred Heart students of Torres Strait background are “losing their culture” it would be something common to all young T.I. people of their age, not peculiar to the Catholic School children. Ever since the American influence on Australian culture during the 1950s and 60s, there have been arguments about “losing culture.” Children raised on Thursday Island are not immune from world trends in young people’s culture, their fashions and interests. It is probably true to say that children graduating from Australian schools – not just schools on T.I. – in the second decade of the twenty-first century, are becoming young people *of the world*.





The purpose of the school – to present Jesus and his message in the tradition of the Catholic Church – continues. The children are annually prepared for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation as has been the case throughout the years. The Principal and staff continue to attempt to nurture an atmosphere of kindness and caring in the classic Christian tradition. Feast Days are celebrated. Prayers and hymns are learned, but more importantly, the children are taught to pray.

Some devotional practices of the past are no longer taught or practised. This would be the case with indulgences or prayers that were previously believed to virtually guarantee salvation.

Regular classroom teaching is supplemented with various excursions and invitations to specialist presenters to visit the school.

Transition to Secondary school is virtually universal, with many Sacred Heart graduates, boys and girls, proceeding to Catholic boarding schools on the mainland or to the Tagai Secondary School on T.I.

Proceeding, then, to university or post-school studies is becoming more common, and the drift to the mainland as a place of permanent residence continues, as it has done for many decades.

It would be probably true to say that graduates of Sacred Heart School, if sufficiently able, feel that they could become anything they wish to be. The example of successes in medicine and the arts in former students is a great encouragement along these lines.

Participation in civic affairs has been a feature of the staff and students of T.I. stretching back to Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. In 2011, the then Mayor of the Torres Shire, Mr. Pedro Stephen, remarked appreciatively at a function at the school<sup>1</sup>, how the blue uniforms of the children of Sacred Heart School were always prominent whenever there was a civic function on T.I.



The population of the school continues to be a mixture of those whose families live permanently on T.I. or Hammond Island, and others whose parents come to T.I. for a limited stay through their employment, either in government administration or teaching or nursing or private business.

The staffing of the school remains a little precarious, because of the remoteness and the difficulty of teachers with families committing themselves to remaining on T.I. for an extended period of time. Finding “relief teachers” at short notice when a teacher is ill or needs to be away, likewise, remains a concern to which there appears to be little prospect of reliable resolution.

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<sup>1</sup> The day before “Mabo Day”, 2011.





(The photo shows Mark Roy of the *Torres News* photographing children in the same setting as a similar photo was taken approximately 100 years previously.)



The happy social integration of all children, irrespective of family background clearly appears to be continuing.

Fund-raising activities by the Parents And Friends, including the Wongai Ball and the Annual Fete, continue to be constants in the life of the school and parish.



There is very little industry on Thursday Island and forecasts of a tourist industry developing, mentioned by a number of commentators in the past, has not yet materialised. As a result, the population of the island consists mainly of those in administration, in employment related to the port, in fishing, in the small number of retailers, in the hospital and schools, and retirees. This population appears to be constant, and likely to remain so. The population of the school, likewise, may remain constant for the foreseeable future.<sup>2</sup>

(Photo shows Mayor Pedro Stephen speaking to the children on the occasion of Mabo Day in 2011.)



(Photo taken during the Mabo Day Procession, 2011, with Bonita Mabo in the wheelchair)

<sup>2</sup> A good summary of this situation was given in 2011 in the book *Torres Strait Islands* (See Bibliography), p.217.: "After a hiatus after World War Two, the [pearlshell] industry picked up again in the 1950s, but the introduction of plastic buttons brought pearl shelling to a close in the 1960s. As a result many islanders moved to the Australian mainland to work, particularly in the backbreaking job of cutting sugar cane and constructing railway lines. Today [2011], of the more than 30,000 people who identify as solely Torres Strait Islanders, only around 7,000 live in the Torres Strait."





## CHAPTER 37

### One hundred and twenty-five years in retrospect

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*“By their fruits you shall know them,”*<sup>1</sup> is a remark that Jesus made in suggesting how we might judge if something or someone was of God.

The aim of the establishment of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School in 1887 was to spread the Gospel of Jesus, expressed in the motto of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart: *“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved.”*



That a school begun with such a mission still continues vibrantly 125 years later seems to our human eyes to clearly indicate a special blessing of God. And the general goodness of the lives of those who have passed through the school seems to suggest that the fruits are, indeed, good.

External observers in the persons of the Government Inspectors stretching back to 1905 tell almost universally of a happy spirit amongst the children and good rapport with the teachers. A number of Inspectors in quite different decades of the long history are quite effusive in their acclaim of the tone and spirit existing in the school and the dedication and zeal of the Sisters.

From the vantage point of the time of writing, the early twenty-first century, the reader will be quite accustomed to schools, even small schools, being well staffed with teachers, teachers' aides, a secretary, cleaners and a teaching Principal.

Not so for more than 70 years. From the foundation in 1887 to the 1960s, the Sisters did everything. And for many years that means *two* teaching Sisters only. Everything in the school day was managed by just two Sisters. The children were divided into several classes or sub-groups and each Sister had to keep abreast of what stage of development and achievement every individual child was up to. Recreation was supervised and there was no such thing as “a period off!”

Occasionally the teaching Sisters were supported in the convent by a non-teaching Sister who would look after the house and prepare meals etc. This released the teaching Sisters from those duties, but it still remains that all the teaching duties – preparation, Catechism, supervising book work, teaching handwriting, spelling, reading, tables, testing, correcting tests and tabulating results, encouraging shy children to speak up, etc. etc. – was entirely done by the two, maybe three, teaching Sisters!

Add to this the establishment and the conduct of the “Orphanage”-cum-Boarding School with its never-ending duties of supervision and provision, including at week-ends.

And over and above all that, the Sisters often took private music students after school and on Saturdays to earn some money for their keep.

It truly is a story of extraordinary zeal, dedication, unrelenting hard work and perseverance through the discouragement of the slow progress of many students of non-English speaking background, most of whom had little knowledge of life or the world outside T.I. or a small Torres Strait island.

Graduates of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School entered the armed forces in the two World Wars, became mariners and pearlers, took over or established family businesses, raised families and contributed in a multitude of ways to the life of the island and the communities they joined on the mainland. Hopefully they took with them the spirit of kindness and thoughtfulness, compassion, forgiveness and sense of justice that they would have picked up almost imperceptibly while at school.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew, 7: 16.

The story of the school has always, of course, gone hand-in-hand with the history of the surrounding society and the history of the Catholic Church. Both have undergone enormous changes while at the same time preserving themes of continuity.

The material changes are gigantic when it is realised that at the time of the first teaching on the convent verandah the first aeroplane was yet to leave the ground and the phonograph had not yet reproduced sound, nor moving pictures entertained our eyes. Radio transmission was still to be developed and the motor car was in its infancy, far away in Europe. All these inventions were, of course, to come to Thursday Island and over the years they and others have been incorporated into ordinary life of the town and the school.

Changes occurred in the Catholic Church, too, and the Sisters, Brothers and the lay teachers who followed them digested the changes and wove them into their own lives and conveyed them to the children and their parents. Following Jesus in the Gospels, receiving the Sacraments and attending Mass continued unaltered through the decades.

Many dedicated priests, the pastors of the Sacred Heart Mission, have ministered faithfully to the children and their parents, administering the Sacraments and being friend and counselor to many a Sister, Brother, staff member and parent. Many have been staunch supporters of the school, and a persistent voice of advocacy in high places.

One theme of continuity on Thursday Island, remarked on intermittently by visitors and residents alike, was how a community of such mixed racial origins, lived and worked happily together. This spirit of pleasant social harmony of the children of diverse backgrounds at Sacred Heart School was noticed and remarked on by the school inspectors who visited the school throughout its history. While some taunting would inevitably have occurred, and did occur, over the decades, it remains true that harmony and unselfconscious social integration was an overall characteristic of the school.

Acceptance of each other irrespective of national or racial origin does not hide the fact that Thursday Island society began with a clear sense amongst the “authorities” of white superiority. What might easily be seen as a very patronising approach to Islanders and coloured citizens, symbolised in the title, “Chief Protector of Aborigines”, the laws and regulations concerning employment and wages in the maritime industry might also be understood as wise and beneficial in the face of possible exploitation, and the inexperience of the local people of the wiles of the unscrupulous. But attitudes changed as times changed and the Second World War ushered in greater equality of conditions for everyone, eventually without any form of distinction.

The town and the school suffered tumultuous dislocation in early 1942 with the forced evacuation of the women and children and the spoiling of homes and businesses during the time the Army occupied T.I. It never regained the grandeur of the earlier stately buildings or the pre-war vibrancy of town social life. The people who returned to T.I. patiently and with resilience rebuilt their lives and businesses. So did the Sisters.

It has been said that a characteristic of Torres Strait people is their adaptability. If something beneficial from another culture comes their way it will be subsumed into their way of life. And for many the possibilities offered by life on T.I. or the Australian mainland did not stand in the way of leaving their traditional island homes and taking up new openings in new places.

The graduates of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, like those of T.I. generally, and former inhabitants of the various islands of the Torres Strait, now call parts of the Australian mainland, home ... while still claiming to be Torres Strait Islanders.

The School experienced hiccups along the way. There were periods when some foresaw the closing of the school, and it was a real possibility. The local Catholic people, however, were very strident in demanding that the school remain open, and the bishops of those times never faltered, and at no time inclined towards closure. During one period of special difficulty the Thursday Island State School kindly took whole classes from the convent school with the inconveniences that that inevitably entailed.



Financial and material support for the school, first recorded in 1891 in a press report of a successful Bazaar, has never been lacking. Generous business people have always been at hand with donations or help with equipment. The “Flying Task Force” of 1983 was a wonderful example of Cairns people coming to help with their skill and personal physical labour. The Catholic Fete has been a feature of the T.I. social calendar for many decades, and brings together numerous “ordinary” generous helpers, donors and supporters. The whirr of the Chocolate Wheel is an institution which has assisted the school and parish for generations.

Generations, too, stretching back to the 1890s, have learned to play the piano or violin, thanks to the Sisters, and have treasured that skill throughout their lives. Others have had doors opened to employment opportunities through their learning of typing and business skills from the Sisters.

Many hundreds recall the inspiration of this teacher or that, and many have kept contact through life with a favourite teacher or teachers.

As with any school it should be remembered that a school is a many-faceted mini-world. At school are learned social graces and human relationships. There are tables to be learned; handwriting and reading to master; facts of History and Geography to be learned; insights into Nature to be gained; rules of games to be understood and teamwork practised; artistic and literary creativity to be nurtured; self-knowledge and self-esteem to be furthered; growing independence to be assisted; wonder to be cultivated; adventure to be enkindled. So much to learn! And all the time to become aware of the superintendence of God the creator over all, and the friendship and inspiration of Jesus, God’s son, born of Mary, known to Catholic children as “Our Lady”.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, has for 125 years been a living, breathing being, nurturing lives of vitality and promise permeated by the teachings of Jesus. If the Christian underpinning of the lives of the graduates of Sacred Heart School is not always overtly obvious or even consciously felt, it is, in a majority of cases, most surely, a background framework for life attitudes that were formed during childhood in the home and in the school.



(Photo is of the statue of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in the school library, 2012)



## CHAPTER 38

### Looking to the future

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(Photo of dawn breaking over Thursday Island at Easter, 2012, heralding a new day. Glancing carefully you can see one ray shining on the school in the far left bottom corner, and another on the church spire. Photo by Br. Tim Beencke.)

While the future of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, Thursday Island, is, of course, in God’s hands, it is well to dream about the future and wise to plan.

Some musings at Easter, 2012, were sought from a variety of folk with an intimate interest in the future of the school.

Dr. Bill Sultmann, Executive Director, Catholic Education Services, Cairns, while looking to the future realized the heritage of the past and how the extraordinary dedication of those teachers who have gone before obliges all to continue with equal zeal:

*“One of the great outcomes of a well researched history is that, in reflecting on a rich and dedicated past, we begin to imagine a future that seeks to respect what has gone before but also looks at ways in which we might continue to make history. Br Barry’s history of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Catholic School has done just that – it has got us thinking. It serves as an extraordinary resource in which mission is wonderfully portrayed.*

*“Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School reminds us that the first footprints of the Catholic faith in the far north were in areas that reflected an emphasis on colonial outposts and mining camps. The foundation stones of our faith in this region are less in Cairns and more in locations like Cooktown, Herberton and Thursday Island.*

*The history of this school, and its service to a diverse and remote community, has permitted us to declare Our Lady of the Sacred Heart as one of two “schools of special character” in the Diocese (the other being Mount St Bernard College at Herberton).”*



Reflecting, likewise, on the many people who have led us to the 125<sup>th</sup> year, Ms. Helen Kett, School Principal during 2012, was mindful of the role of present families and staff:

*"At this very exciting moment in the story of our school we have been reflecting on all of the people who have throughout the last 125 years strived, laughed, cried and dreamed, to make Our Lady of the Sacred Heart on T.I. and Hammond a great school. Their initial vision has led us to where we are now. It is also important however, to acknowledge the present families and staff who continue this tradition and who are now focused on ensuring our present day students have access to up to date curriculum, resources and a learning environment that prepares them for their future. It is within the context of this present day reflection that our future goals are set. In an ever changing world our students and staff need all the same advantages available to a student attending a school in a major city."*

Helen continued:

*"During the last five years we have taken advantage of the funding available to all schools to improve both buildings and school environment. When we look at the next five to ten years we need to anticipate as much as possible, the direction in which education is moving. There are many aspects of our school that are steeped in Catholic tradition and Torres Strait culture that are fundamental to our school ethos and without which, we would not remain true to the vision of those who began our school 125 years ago. This does not mean we should get left behind in the education arena where the development of a modern dynamic learning environment is a common goal for all schools."*

The theme of Torres Strait culture was also taken up by current (2012) teacher, Stacey Whiteside:

*"Life in the Torres Strait is a beautiful experience but can be difficult for some people as it is very distant from the mainland. However the feeling of culture in the Torres Strait is very welcoming. Culture is so strong in beliefs and values and this is incorporated into our school life in every area possible, and this culture will continue forever. This welcoming feeling that is generated by the community members and staff towards its newcomers sees new teachers and their families quickly and efficiently adapt to their new ways of life and teaching in the Torres Strait. Teachers at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School support each other both occupationally and socially, which is much appreciated in a tight-knit community."*

Stacey goes on to dream about a possible vision for the future of the school:

*"I foresee and hope the future of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School might become a Junior School combined with Middle School in order to cater for students living in the Torres Strait. This would give families an opportunity for their children to attend an exceptional Catholic School on Thursday Island, past Year 7."*

This was written at a time when Queensland schools were about to transfer the final year, Year 7, into secondary school, and also at a time when a "national" curriculum was being introduced into all States.

These themes are touched on by Helen Kett:

*The introduction of Pre prep and the move of Year 7 to Secondary school may change the structure of our school but not the heart of our school. Plans to re-do the administration building, new playground equipment and continual up-grading of resources on both campuses are part of the master plan of our school. New permanent shade and a new shed over on Hammond will provide a better quality environment for our young students attending the Hammond campus. Use of modern technology, refurbishing resources and the commitment to the new National Curriculum should ensure our students are not disadvantaged in future educational opportunities. Continuing to develop valuable ties with the secondary schools within our diocese and maintaining a strong relationship with our local Torres Strait community will assist the O.L.S.H. school community in continuing to be a relevant and progressive education facility for the future."*

*The gospel message of Jesus remains central to school life here at O.L.S.H. As a Catholic school steeped in both Catholic tradition and local cultural heritage the school community continues, and will continue, to strive to live up to our school motto: 'All for Jesus'."*

Teacher, Stacey Whiteside, remarks on the school keeping up with changes, some of which were in progress at the very time of writing:

*"I believe success and growth will be forthcoming for the future of the school. Changes in the physical setting are already bringing positive reviews from the community. This will only grow with time as the new library opens and a new user-friendly play area is completed. Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School is on a continuous pathway of change. It has not defied trends and stayed still; and I see this movement of change paralleling society's changes in the future."*

This theme of keeping up with changes is echoed by reflections of the 2011/12 President of the school's Parents & Friends Association, Kimberly See Kee. She remarks:

*"The school has seen a growth in pupil numbers recently and there have been some important changes during the past 5 years, such as the renovation of classrooms and the construction of the new library that will ensure that OLSHS has a strong future ahead of it."*

*"Looking to the future the school will become a greener school, with solar panels already installed, and the recycling cans program, both educating pupils about our environment while reducing the school's carbon footprint each year."*

*"The future is also an exciting time with the National Curriculum transition underway that will eventually position OLSHS with the same education standards as all Australian schools."*

Dr. Sultmann concluded his reflections thus:

*Finally, we have in our experience with Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School, a living, working example of how we might outreach Catholic Education to other smaller remote communities, especially those with strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation. As we seek to extend our role, this historic school is here to give us a lesson, as all good schools should. It is one that looks back before it looks forward, and in visiting the future we come to appreciate the ever-present action of the Spirit who sustains and guides our mission outreach in ways that inform and inspire."*



(This symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit is part of the mural behind the altar of the T.I. church, painted in 1935 by David Sing.)





## APPENDIX

### Staff and Students, Our Lady Of The Sacred Heart School, 2012

*Principal:* Ms Helen Kett, *Assistant Principal Religious Education:* Br Tim Beencke, fms,  
*Learning Support Teacher & Literacy Enrichment Teacher:* Mrs Christine Gawne,  
*Curriculum Coordinator:* Mrs Stacey Whiteside, *School Secretary:* Ms Marsha Loban

#### Thursday Island Campus

*Prep Teacher:* Mrs Julie Weisfelt, *Year 1 / 2 Teacher:* Mrs Stacey Whiteside, *Year 3 / 4 Teacher:* Mrs Marion Ball,  
*Year 5 / 6 Teacher:* Mr Tauvale Faleono, *Year 7 Teacher:* Miss Lasmintan Ah Boo, *Curriculum Coordinator Release Teacher:* Mrs Kaye Smith,  
*School Officers:* Mrs Christine Benjamin, Ms Chi Chi Fujii, Mrs Jenny Kairupan-Vellis, Ms Sharon Love,  
Mrs Margaret See Kee (*also Tuckshop*), Mrs Irene Stone, Ms Celeste Whiting, Mrs Amy Yates,  
*Groundsman:* Mr Tallie Frank

<i>Prep</i>	<i>Year 1</i>	<i>Year 3</i>	<i>Year 5</i>	<i>Year 7</i>
Starkysa Councillor	Zali Bannister	Taykesha Benjamin	Xanthika Fay Busch	Zillah Bowie
India Heemi	Zoe Fava	Beauty Bowie	Charlotte Horn	Jade David
Jordan Manaena	Willow Ferguson	Zoe David-Sabatino	Palysse Love-Beasley	Shauna Riggs
Paige Rennie	Carrie-Anne Ketchell	Deeyen Gower	Neru Mills	Valda-Anne Sabatino
Lilly-Ana See Kee	Bella Murray	Karla Mills	Leah Tarrant	Courtney Weare
	Kate Nicholls	Alana Nicholls	Prudence Yates	
Feenin Conaty	Acacia Smith	Bethany Purdy		Daniel Jenkins
Angus Dunkeld		Ella Wienert	Sean David	Joseph Krebs
Tura Larry	Joseph Cowell		Maximus McGrath-Daniels	Sario Mills
Boston Love-Beasley	Jacob David	Kenneth Councillor	Jayden Seden	Coen Nicholls
Jack Whiteside	Thomas Horn	Jaliell Nathaniel	Seth Seden	Jack Polkinghorne
	Ben Mills	Kais Skerritt	Kydan Wienert	
	Paikai Nagibu	John Pitt		
	Jayne Polkinghorne	Conner Rennie	<i>Year 6</i>	
	Sachin See Kee	Isaiah Smith	Anah Garnier	
	Seth Wright	Declan Thompson	Joyra Pitt	
			Kacheyah See Kee	
			Olivia Treacy	
	<i>Year 2</i>	<i>Year 4</i>		
	Georgia Heemi	Laianie Benjamin		
	Jemma Mosby	Kantisha Daniel	Iziah Johnston-Dorante	
	La'Shauna Nathaniel	Rozahlia Dorante	Brandon Lawrie	
	Thalia Seden	Serianne Dorante-Garnier	Nathaniel Majid	
	Amelya See Kee		Adam Milbourne	
		Tyrese David-Sabatino	Murray Ridley	
	Ethan Connor	Ngukis Faud	Ryan See Kee	
	Liam Peddell	Kostya Moloney-David	Anson Ware	
		Patrick Pearson-Bowie	Joshua Yamashita	
		Dominique Purdy		
		Chae Riley		
		Heath Treacy		
		Gordon Yates		

#### Hammond Island Campus

*Campus Coordinator & Year 1 / 2 / 3 Teacher:* Mrs Gayle Frank, *PrePrep / Prep Teacher:* Mrs Josephine David-Petero  
*School Officers:* Ms Bernadine David, Ms Sheree Nona, Mrs Kerrie-Anne Sabatino  
*Cleaner:* Ms Harriet Dorante, *Groundsman:* Mr John Dorante

<i>Pre-Prep</i>	<i>Prep</i>	<i>Year 1</i>	<i>Year 2</i>	<i>Year 3</i>
Dahlia Amber	Zahdein Bowie-Pearson	Jakey Dorante-Pearson	Anima Dorante-Garnier	Giaan Sabatino
Beka Lilly Dorante	Sean Seriat	Debah Faud	Methraima Faud	
Shakyah Dorante	Charles Sabatino	Keanu Pearson		Zawai Garnier
	Victor Sabatino	Fredrick Seden	Oskar Sabatino	Daniel Sabatino
Caden Pearson			Zachariah Sabatino	
Teddy Pearson				
Baden Sabatino				

*Priest:* Fr Jude Ronayne-Forde OFM



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